





My Heart and

My Flesh

By the same author

THE TIME OF MAN

A Novel — Mcmxxvi

UNDER THE TREE

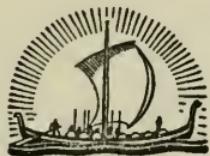
Poems — Mcmxxii

My Heart and My Flesh

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*“My heart and my flesh crieth out
for the living God.”*—PSALMS 84.2

A NOVEL BY
ELIZABETH MADOX ROBERTS



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To My Sister

L. R. B.

MY HEART AND MY FLESH

PROLOGUE

As a child, Luce was running to the store to get a small can of oil, for it was growing dark and she had the lamp to fill. Across the street the lamp-lighter was lifting a burning swab of waste to the street-lamp, a gasoline lamp on the top of a high post. The lamp-lighter stood on a ladder to lift the brand, and when the lamp was lit he would take the ladder on his shoulder and walk away at an even step, the same yesterday and the same tomorrow. When he had new shoes the step was marked with crying leather. She ran past the lamp-lighter hardly giving a moment to look at him, for she knew all his ways and all his motions, all the rhythms of his feet. The street-lamp made a thin, feeble light when there was any day left in the air, but the lighter had to start on his rounds early to have all the lamps ready by the time the dark came to the last one at the end of Hill Street. The lamp flickered dimly in the light of day that was left in the air, but after a little a passer would be glad for the glow; it showed the way to the pump and helped one over the well-curb and over the stones at the crossing. On dark nights when there was a wind the mules in the livery stable cried out with great cries. There would

be a wind that night making little wells of feeling pool up in one's chest, and a thought of Mome, the city, came to her mind.

There, in Mome, all the lights were electric, and there was one great light over all the place, a high great light like a sun. It shone down on the streets and on the tall house where Mr. Preston, the richest man in the world, kept his money—the money house—and on the fountains in the square. It made a great sheet of light that spread over Mome as a sunset would spread over a hill. But there were dark alleyways for all that, and dark doorways, and at the thought deep wells of feeling would pool up in one's chest, dark roadways and deep doorways and dark lanes where wheels had cut deep tracks. There would be houses standing high above lanes and late wagons going down into the dark. There would be a little light at the corner, electric but very little, blinking in the fog. A thief would be slipping down a dark lane with—what? one could never think what—in his hand.

In the store the boy with thin arms took her oil can and said, "A dime's worth?" and set the can aside to wait until the man came with the key to the oil house. She stood beside the old black man who was buying a nickel's worth of meal and a dime's worth of bacon, her eyes on the hurrying clerk whose arms reached here and there above the barrels and weighed the sugar as it poured in a stream into a sack. She enjoyed the crowding of the store and the pageant of

buying. A heroic freedom surrounded the man, old Anthony Bell, who bought lavishly, never asking the price, calling over the heads of the others, "A hundred pounds of sugar. Send it up tomorrow." He had stepped lightly in at the doorway, a lifted head, the large gesture of shouting and the lifted cane, "Send it up tomorrow," and then his exit while the piece went forward, the play enhanced.

Moll Peters, the negress, came heavily in at the door and stood beyond Luce, waiting her turn. She was large and fat and the belt of her apron sank into the rolls of her body and was lost from sight. She would buy freely as long as her money lasted, buying for her children on Hill Street; she cooked at the hotel and had no need to buy food for herself. "Ol' Hog Mouth, what-all you a-buyen?" she said to a tall man who stood beyond her, a tall yellow man whose clothes were white with plaster. "You ain't treated Moll this whole enduren year." Her voice came from her mouth with a clatter of low half-musical squawks and softly blurred vowels delicately stressed.

"Aw, go on," the man said. He kept in a good humor. "It's a God's truth, now. Whenever did you-all ever treat Moll? Pocket full o' money. Ol' Stingy! Buy Moll some candy."

"Aw go on. Buy your own candy."

"It's a God's own truth, now. Whenever did you ever buy Moll any candy? Go and buy me some candy."

"I ain't got no money. I swear I'm got to ask credit till Sat'day for a little meal and lard. I swear."

"Aw, buy me some candy."

Moll was trying to make up with the yellow man. The grocer's clerk came back with the can of oil and Luce dumped the money, a nickel and five coppers, into his large hand and turned quickly toward the door, remembering now that she must fill the lamp. She ran home through the twilight. The lamp-lighter had gone from the street now and all the lights glimmered faintly, broadly, because they had not yet been concentrated into points by the dark. They marched unevenly up the street, far past the Baptist Church, past the Seminary gate.

IN the lecture room of the church Miss Charlotte Bell played the march for the children. There was to be a pageant. The girls walked to the time of the music, spreading over the platform and returning, opening the lines and making fans or closing together into a design. Theodosia Bell, Miss Charlotte's daughter, walked first, leading, and the music of the piano said the words of the song as Miss Charlotte drummed the keys with her fingers. Miss Charlotte hardly looked at the piano as she played. She looked at the girls who were walking up and down, her head turned about, her lips bending into smiles or her head nodding. Miss

Patty Thomas ran up and down before the platform telling how the march should be done. "Now, all together. Up front, Theodosia. Now down center back." Her tongue clicked over the words and she was important beating her hands. Theodosia walked tossing her body with the up-and-down toss of the music, to the words which the girls would sing after a little, "To the tap of the drum here we come come come." There was a stop to rearrange some of the girls.

"Whose little girl is this? What's her name?"

"Luce. She's Luce Jarvis."

"She lives down the street a way."

It was Miss Charlotte who had answered the last. Luce walked near the end of the line and they were off again to the tap of the music, some of them lilting to the time, some heavily laboring, unaware of the beat. If Miss Charlotte nodded her head to the patter of feet she smiled the next instant, but when the song was done, while Miss Patty talked to the children about what they should do, Miss Charlotte sat as if she did not hear, and then her lips were without life and a darkness seemed to have come over her. She looked then at the piano keys, her hands in her lap, or her younger child, Annie, would creep up beside her and push her little face into her broad shoulder.

A boy was taken to the platform to say a piece, Miss Patty showing him how, and the other children went to the seats or they spread about on the floor. "To the tap of the drum here we come come come" had been

set aside now, and a girl said, "I like that song." "It's a Faust march," Miss Charlotte said. The word "Faust" fitted to Miss Charlotte's mouth after it had been said and remained hers entirely, whatever it meant. The Bells lived a little way up the street past the well from which Luce drank, past the street-light, the house standing under a great tree and near two other trees. Looking at Miss Charlotte after she had grown dark, the music ended, her face heavy, Luce thought of the word Anthony, Anthony Bell, the old man, father to Horace Bell who was Miss Charlotte's husband. Anthony Bell, as words, made a sort of singing in her thought if they came forward as tone, or if they lay quiet they were reminiscent of the faint kindness offered by drama, by enriched being. He was an old man and a scholar, as was said. Luce remembered their house with Miss Charlotte walking on the lower gallery and saw the planes of her pale dress as she stood a moment before one of the large square pillars. Anthony Bell came and went behind her, stepping along the gallery in his easy slippers, taking a morning walk. Now the voice of the boy tattled endlessly over the piece he was learning to say and the little girls lolled together, teasing one another slyly. Luce went into Miss Patty's feet as they twinkled about and she felt the flutter of the skirt as it swept her ankles, and she knew what it was to be two slim little shoes buckled over two insteps that rested on pointed toes and hour-glass heels, and to walk in harmony with someone's

thinking, up and down, objecting, agreeing, complaining, repeating. Near at hand the piano was a large black box holding an infinity of tunes somehow in its sides. She looked at Charlotte Bell where she sat waiting. The eyes were dark, averted, and the mouth had no smile. Her large shoulders were erect and her rich dress crumpled about her feet.

Charlotte Bell's hands could fly easily over the piano if she were minded to make a tune. Sometimes in the evening old Anthony played his fiddle standing beside her as she played. Her rich white dress had many yards of small lace sewed into it in designs and her hat was off. Her dark hair was laid softly over her head and knotted at the back in a large coil. Luce looked at her and felt her presence reach past the white dress as if there were some large thing inside. Then she laid her bare. She tore away the clothes from around her shoulders and opened her body. She emptied the heart out of it and flung out the entrails, for she had seen men butcher a hog. She went searching down through blood and veins, liver and lights, smelt and kidney. Out came the fat, the guts, the ribs. She was looking for something. Then on beyond, past the flesh, to the bone, she was searching. Past the brains, past the skull bone. She flung everything aside as she took it out and went deeper, eager to find. Past the bones she came to the skin again, on the other side, and finally to the red of the yarn carpet, everything rejected, nothing found, nothing left. Quickly she reassembled Miss Charlotte.

She brought back the bone, the flesh, the organs. She hooked the right arm onto its shoulder and hooked on the left. She set her head on her shoulders and fitted her back into her dress. Put together again, Miss Charlotte suggested something within, hinted of it with her turning mouth and with the slight movement of her limbs under the pretty dress, gave a brief warning of it in the way the lace was sewed into the dress and the way the two large pins were placed to hold up her hair.

All the while the red of the carpet and the smell of the carpet gave a flavor of Sunday and the catechism. There was a question then, she thought, for every answer. The little girls were weary of the boy's speech and his dull gestures and weary of Miss Patty's efforts to arouse his voice to eloquence. Luce looked from one to another, letting her self enter the arrogance of one, the humility of one, the stupidity of one. She saw what it would be not to know a rhythm, to march as Esther marched, on dull feet. The tone of the Sunday questioning pervaded the place, question and answer, final and done, well said. All that was asked had a reply, curt and certain. She looked at Miss Charlotte where she sat behind the piano, her eyes on the keys, and the questions took possession of the event.

Who made you, Miss Charlotte?
God.

Why did God make Miss Charlotte?
For His own glory.

Old Mr. Bell had a collection of Indian arrow-points and stone hatchets mounted and displayed in cabinets that were strung through the halls and passages of the house. Luce had once stood wondering at the door of a hallway while Theodosia called to her to come and play. "Oh, come on, come on," she had called. "Leave those old rubbishes. What's any good beside a game? You're It. Come on." But a child had told of a wonder. Old Mr. Bell had once opened the cabinet of Indian relics and had shown the children the arrow-flints, had let them take some of them into their hands. They were hard stone weapons from the stone age of the country before the time of the white men. Luce had not been present and the cabinets had never been opened for her. Miss Charlotte sat now turning the pages of a music book, her eyes busy with the songs in the book. Once, in a game, when she was not It, and when she was so well hidden that no one could find her, so well that she was forgotten, Luce had slipped into the hallway of the largest of the cabinets, a rear enclosed gallery, and had looked her fill at the wonders inside. She knew that these wonders had been picked up from an old Indian battlefield not far from the town. Horace Bell was a tall man, standing above most of the people of the street. He had a great voice that sometimes burst from the court-room when

he made a speech there. He had a pride in his voice and he liked to roll out long sayings that gave it a chance to flow and turn and recede. One day he had boomed at some pigeons that took flight and swept across the street by the pump with a low thunder of wings, and he had made a saying quickly to run with them in their going, his eyes full of his laughter. He had then run his hand through his upstanding yellow hair with a great gesture and had taken a remembered delight in the pigeons and his voice that could match their rumble of wings. Miss Tennie Burden, Tennessee, lived out another street. The Sunday questioning passed into the region of Miss Charlotte's darkly averted, sad face.

How can I glorify God?

By loving Him and doing His holy will.

Can you see God?

No, but He can always see me.

Does Charlotte Bell know about Tennie Burden?

She knows.

Does she care because Horace Bell goes to sit in Miss Tennie's doorway?

Ask somebody else.

Why would she care?

A big girl said she would care. A big girl knew why.

What do Horace Bell and Miss Tennie talk about?

About old times.

Who is Miss Tennie's husband?

Mr. Joe Burden.

How many children has Miss Tennie got?

Two. Joyce and Evaline.

Any boys?

No boys.

How do you know that you have a soul?

Because I can think about God and the world
to come.

I can't think about God and the world to come.

Try.

I tried.

Who made Theodosia Bell?

God, I reckon.

Is God a smell or something?

Whose little girl is this?

Luce. Luce Jarvis.

She lives down the street a way.

Her own look had looked back at her out of Charlotte Bell's look when Charlotte had spoken to give the answer. To see Charlotte then was to remember Tennessee Burden and to pluck in mind at the strange fair vapor that gathered before Charlotte's darkness and over her sadness, Tennie Burden, her bright hair easily curled over her head. She would sit in her door all day, the gallery with its high pillars running close to the roadway, and she would stop any who passed to

talk a little. The cushions at her feet were soft and warm. She would stop any who passed, even Moll Peters, even Uncle Nelse, even Stiggins, the small yellow boy who lived in the livery stable.

Questioning the question, the hour passed and was eaten away entirely when the march began again. "To the tap of the drum here we come come come" spread through the entire air now. Luce looked at Theodosia as she marched and looked into her pride in walking first and her pride again in the feel of the drumming of the music, her feet set down rightly upon the rhythm. She looked at her. She was the daughter of Charlotte Bell and Horace. Her hair was brown with an over-tint of red that showed at the sides where the rolls were turned up to the light and showed again where the ends of the braid sprayed out beyond the ribbon below her shoulders and down her back. She spread a trail of herself down the platform as she went proudly first, the other girls walking on her steps, setting feet down where she guided, she leaving a comet-train of herself behind to be entered, walked into, known by the knower, the chronicler.

THE boy who lived in the livery stable was named Stiggins, a yellow boy who slept somewhere in the stable in the straw. If travelers came long after night they were obliged to pound on the door and cry out

for admittance for their horses, and then the night man would send Stiggins down to open the door. The men who worked at the stable gave Stiggins bits of money from time to time. When there was not much to do the hostlers would tease Stiggins by locking him into the loft or the old harness closet or by holding him under the spout of the pump. Or they would crack a whip under his knees to make him jump up high to avoid the keen sting of the whip-snapper. Sometimes when the proprietor was gone all day this sport went on for hours until Stiggins would cry, but if he cried he was unfailingly locked into the loft or the harness closet. He seemed happiest on court day when there was a great crowd in town and many horses to care for. Everybody was busy then, calling him to do this or to do that, speaking quickly, even cheerily. "Here, Stig, take this filly and hurry back with fifty-four. Twenty-two wants feed, but sixteen just a hitch."

Stiggins was not, in fact, a name; some of the men had given it to him one day when he was leaping to escape the whip. His mother was Dolly Brown, a half-witted negress who lived in the alley behind the jail, and his father had been some white man. Luce saw him going about, a small boy, as small as herself; and he belonged to the stable. He was not, she assumed, a real being, and it did not matter what one did to him. Push him into the stall where the horse manure was thrown, make him pump all morning at the broken pump, tear a bigger hole in his old ragged breeches, or

make him leap to avoid the whip, it was no matter. He was a half-wit; he could never learn; he was not real. But Luce was often sorry for Stig. She had inferred that he was not a real creature, and this pity which she had was, then, sentimental. Even she felt that it must be somehow false and unnecessary, pretty in some way, as if one would be sorry for a hog because it lay in the mire. His mouth was loose and easy to drip. He would do anything anyone told him to do, or once in a while, reversed, he would do nothing anyone told him to do. He was not real, was scarcely there at all, was not a being; but often when he was tormented until he cried, or when he was locked into the filthy dark of the old harness closet, or when his clothes were torn anew until he cringed under some sort of shame that, curiously enough, he seemed to have about him, Luce would feel the approach of her own tears and a hurt would gather in her breast and spread as a fog through her members, through the substance of the earth and the air. She would wander about, unable to discover the cause, unable to discern the result or resolve it to any meanings. At the end of her confusion she would think again of Mome with richer ecstasy.

The streets of Mome were the streets of Anneville, running right and left, in and out, as she knew and saw, but over these—Hill Street, Main Street, Jackson Street, Simon Street, Tucker Lane, Crabtree Lane—lay the great city of Mome, reaching out for miles

and adding other streets and avenues, Chester, Dover, Cowslip, Bangor, Elm, Pine, Walnut, Vine, and many more, running out among fair parks and lovely gardens. Instead of the low shops on Main Street there arose great office buildings and spires and towers where people fluttered by, quick in their steps, beautiful, alert. On Jackson Street in Anneville grew great poplar trees under which men sat all day telling slow stories they had told over and over before, old men grown epic with age and fatalism. Their refrains recurring were, "Ain't that always the way! . . . No sooner you get . . . but along comes a place to spend it. . . . Looks like as soon as a man gets on his feet. . . . Always the way. . . ." They spoke without malice, interspersing their wisdom with long slow happenings. "Did ever you know hit to fail? . . . Would a man ever strike hit on his corn and his wheat in one and the same year? . . . But of course it had to happen that way. . . . About the time Luke got outen that-there fix here a note he owed at the bank fell due, but it so happened that corn turned out right good that year and he tided over. . . ." These were the leisured and the old setting a summary on the town. In the square the prisoners from the jail worked on the rock pile and thus gave a meager drama to the slow scene. But over this lay Jackson Street in Mome, as one might read in a book, tall offices and great palaces where courts were held, where the great went about the great business of the world, the great busi-

ness of men. Over the cobbler's shop stood a palace where some unguessed thing transpired. Coincident with Rusty Fuller's harness shop, having its same contours enhanced and made splendid in size, stood a white tower with a top that shone high in the sunlight and here some important deed not yet realized or named had befallen and would continue to befall. Beyond stood the library, pillars of marble and cupola of gold, and inside one could have all the books of the world for the asking. Great tiers of books, bound in brown or gold or blue, stood on shelves, the wonders of all ages and the knowledge of all time, future and past. One had only to go inside the wide marble doors and nothing would be denied, the reason for this or that and the time of all things being there set down in books and explained, and there were all beautiful stories and songs.

With a swift effort she could take the whole library with all its wisdom into her heart, a swift ecstasy. She would think of Mome as she worked indoors, a consolation. Or she would think of Mome again as she hurried across the pasture among the low weeds, going to gather blackberries on the hill. The sudden appearance of a tender little sickle moon up in the western sky—and Mome. A report of a thief, an adventurer, a disaster, a bold deed, a shame, a carnival, and, enhanced, it enriched itself in Mome, it grew there to heroic proportions. Turning swiftly in at the small gate, returning from the well, the day being slow, a duplicate

of days past, when the street was hot and fly-ridden and the trash from the stores littered the roadway, she could hang her head far to one side and look down the street toward the court-house and the jail and see a street in Mome where marble causeways ran up to marble stairs and tall white walls gave out onto high balconies, cool and fresh in a sweet wind, the people eager and exact and clear, intent with being.

In Mome there was nothing commonplace and dreary. There time never waited upon a fly-blown afternoon. Quick sayings flashed on the lips of men there, true finalities or bright quips—jest with the sudden tilt of quicksilver.

THE people came to the church on Sundays wearing rustling clothes, some of them riding in carriages that were harnessed to plow horses or to driving nags or gay well-bred roadsters. In the church the ladies taught lessons of the regeneration of the elect and the death in Adam, all men born in a state of sin, of Eve who had eaten the fruit and had given of it to Adam, that what God did foreknow that he did ordain. The words would be confused with drowsiness and weariness, and the foreknowledge of God would settle to the odors of the yarn carpet and the dry melancholy of the village Sabbath, sin being any want of conformity to or transgression of the law of God. A savory wooden tray would

be passed about for the collection, a tray smelling of rich cedar wood and varnish. The savor of the tray being passed and done, the lady would draw the mind back again to the hard matter of Eden and sin, to the fearful definition which was heavy with meaningless wordings. Was it for this, these laborings with odorless words and long unregenerated sayings, that she, Luce Jarvis, that she, Theodosia Bell, had put on her new white dress and her silk sash? It was an impenetrable matter. The foreknowledge arose from the carpet in an aromatic stench, but the desire to cough would not follow. There was no relief. Want-of-conformity-to took Transgression-of into a great stale book and closed flat the covers, and in Adam all men were born in a state of sin. Eve was a woman and a terrible instigator of Want-of-conformity-to. The lady teacher was severe upon Eve. But Adam, said the lady, was equal with her in guilt.

Each Sunday came the gayety of putting on the favored dress, the best muslin. There would be the tying of the sash, an anxious ceremony, a flutter of petticoats brushing at the knees, the happiness of the Sunday hat. There would be the sprig of honeysuckle to wear at the breast, or a rosebud brought in from the garden for Theodosia, brought by her grandfather and presented, "A morning gift to a little lady, a posy to set off her pretties." Then, in the church, the clatter of greetings and pleasure in one's coming. "Here's a seat. Sit here. Glad you came. . . . How sweet she looks.

. . . How sweet we all look, all the little folks. This bright Sabbath morning . . . ”

Then the business of getting settled, the text asked all around. The hour grew long and time was suppressed. Time lost all elasticity and became a fixed substance. The seat turned hard like the impenetrable words; the seat pressed with infinite woodenness at her flattened thighs and her pointed spine. Adam was equal. Moses had been given the law. Holy Men taught by the Holy Ghost had written the book. They were all undiscernible with age, older than the earth, Adam, Eve the woman. Would she be Mrs. Eve? Or Miss Eve? Who ever heard of a woman named Eve? She was rejected entirely. The whole hour was sunk, Adam, Moses, Eve, God, Want-of-conformity, Holy Men, sunk into unyielding time. Men far across the church were shaking hands, curious persons, playing at living, but in earnest about it. The foreknowledge continued to arise with Adam, who was in all equal, and through him we are all born in sin. Once into the hour flashed a meaning, a clear thought, a sum toward which all was momentarily moved, the relation never clear but the summary comprehended: To do good, to act right.

All the little girls were dressed in muslins and some of them were perfumed. The lady teacher wore tight kid gloves and smelled of some sweet stuff, her shining shoe just peeping from the edge of her dress. One little girl would tell of a sin she knew of. Somebody she

would not name had said a book was hers when it was really her sister's.

"That was very wrong," the lady said. "That was a lie, and God looks into our hearts and knows when we lie. You can deceive another person but you cannot deceive God, for God knows all things."

"And I knew a boy," another child said, "and he found a ball and kept it for his own because he found it."

"That was wrong too," the lady said, a hard voice, "for he might have found the owner of the ball if he had tried. You cannot escape the eye of God. He sees all we do and looks into every heart. We can never deceive God, for He knows our inmost thoughts."

MOLL PETERS was a friendly person, always kind to a child. She worked in a house where boarders were kept and where there were two other servants, a dark thin girl and a man named Berry. Other negroes would come to the kitchen, two or three men often, for Moll would slip them a bite of something to eat, a fresh hot pie or a cookie or a piece of bread dripping with rich hot gravy. They would laugh loud over their stories and carry forward their jokes from day to day. Or having been reticent because of the presence of a child, speaking in half-syllables and signs, they would suddenly flash quick fearful stories they knew.

Moll was trying to win over the young man, Berry, from the dark girl. He would eat her hot sops and pies and kiss her fat jaws, but in the end he would go when the dark girl called him, and the dark girl was not afraid. She would look at Berry with hard gathering eyes or hold out toward him briefly one dark thin hand whose palm was pale yellow-white, and she would treat Moll with friendly indifference, bragging on her pies and her sauces.

Berry would sing a song, throwing into the words an infinity of soft gliding modulations and quickly-breathed grace-notes, looking meltingly at Moll as he sang. His song,

I cannot stand to see my baby lose,
I love her from her head down to her shoes,

would burst through the great laughter when he came down from the dining-room with a tray. The kitchen knew that Horace Bell was the father of Miss Tennie's unborn infant. This fact was well known to the pans in the scullery closet under the sink, to the pans and skillets that were put away into the secret and ill-odored dark but would come clattering out in the hurry of their wanting.

"Ol' big-mouthed devil!" Moll said once with a great laugh, after a great roll of laughter and a whispered comment. "Him and Miss Tennie! God knows!"

Known, these, to the pans and pots and skillets, to the spoons and dippers and colanders, but not to the

sauces and syrups and gravies and roasts that went up to the boarders' dining-room. A gravy could roll discreetly out from a skillet and leave all knowledge behind to flavor the rich scrapings which Moll spooned upon a bit of bread for her own mouth or for the mouth of some chosen friend.

Miss Nannie Poll and Mr. Trout flavored one of Moll's sops, a sauce which was sweet with the grease of knowledge. A white man was the father of Letty's youngone, and old Mr. Preacher Benton was, God knew, a feisty old cuss, after Mag. She, Moll, had nursed old Mrs. Putty in her deliriums and listened to her talk all night, and the men that woman had had in her time would fill a prayer-meeting, God knew, if half she said in her ravings was true. Old Jonas Beatty smelled like a billygoat, and Miss Jodie Whippleton tried to hide her dead brat in the calf lot but the hogs got in and rooted it up for her.

Coming down across the kitchen yard with a tilted tray and a burst of song, Berry would cast a melting, joyful glimmer of eyes toward Moll. Her poor fat would quiver with pleasure and pain. His lilted words,

I'm proud o' my black Venus,
No coon can come between us. . . .

would accent his quick coming steps and he would clatter the dishes from the tray with cunning small gestures.

"Aw Be'y," Moll would plead, ready to cry.

My gal, she's a high-born lady,
She's dark but not too shady.
Down the line, oh, there we shine,
Me an' that high-born gal o' mine. . . .

“Aw, Be'y, go on,” a softly pled distress.
“I just likes to sing,” Berry said, “and someways
I'm partial to that old song.”

“Oh, God knows, if I ain't let Mr. Preacher Benton's soft-boiled egg get as hard as a rock. God knows! Hard as nails!” A wail from a voice that was near its tears.

“Aw, put a little water in it and stir it up. The preacher, he'll not never know the difference,” the dark girl said.

“I'll not do so. I'm a fool, I am. I won't send up no such egg to nobody. I'll make another one. Poor old Moll. Hand me a egg outen the icebox, Be'y, whilst I make the water boil again. Poor old Moll.” She was weeping now.

From the icebox to the stove with the egg shuffled in his hand. The handsome yellow boy with his melting quiver of eyes and already broken promise, broken in its borning.

I'll telegraph my baby,
She'll send ten or twenty maybe. . . .

“Aw Be'y, go on,” Moll was pleading again, won again and rejected. “Aw, Be'y.”

At the Seminary, chapel service was held each morning in the chief assembly hall, the great and the little being required in attendance. The small children sat on the front seats, huddled together, fearful that some impossible thing might be demanded of them. On some mornings there were opening songs, or now and then a girl would walk to the platform and say a piece in a light, pretty voice, or a large boy would pronounce an oration. The song, all singing together, would roll out in a great shaking throb of noise and pain that beat upon sensitive ears and passed inward to become a pleasure, under the noise running the music.

Land where our fathers died,
Land where the Pilgrims pried. . . .

On the blackboard were the algebraic emblems and geometric designs belonging to the great boys and girls. Small children who had labored to keep their efforts at learnings distinct, who had used letters for spelling words and numbers for making sums, read upon the board of the assembly hall such dissipated and trivial statements as $a - b = 6$.

Beyond the lessons of the books and the precepts of the teachers the young moved in the great flow of the body of human knowledge, learning slowly from one another. The fruit of knowledge passed downward perpetually from the older groups, becoming more grotesque as it descended beyond the reach of its ac-

companying emotions. The bulging piano legs on the chapel platform were with child, pregnant. The Pilgrims were thought of as a prying lot; they were heard of around Thanksgiving Day. A child had once designated his navel as his birthplace. A small child in an upper back room, dressing for a pageant, whispered to another child, "That's my birthplace." Word of it was passed about in a whisper; it was doubtless true; there was such a word; it could be found in the spelling book. In the assembly a child looked hard at the pregnant piano leg, trying to distinguish a mark upon it. Another day, and the mark was there, the birthplace.

Luce had learned to read and was passing well into the body of knowledge. The games were a delight, and so too were the calisthenics when one marched on light toes, Theodosia walking first. One day a group gathered on the playground around a crying child that had fallen on the gravel. The teacher assured him that the mishap had not hurt him, that it was but a light scratch, nothing to cry for. The crowd began to spread about.

"What was the matter?" was asked.

"Fell down and scratched his cuticle a little," the teacher said.

Did she have a cuticle? she wondered. She had never heard anyone say that she had scratched or bruised or torn or maimed her cuticle. She dared not ask.

Numbers became rich designs when they passed beyond the commonplace literalness of addition. A multiplication table was a poem and a song. The numbers, written and viewed, kept personalities within their shapes and evoked colors even after they became parts of tables, the number songs. One, written 1, was whimsical and comical, unserious, too easy to learn and to write. No child could ever take it heavily, for anyone could have invented it. 2 was beyond knowing in its infinity of curves and arcs that melted into an angle and stiffened into a straight line. It had caused tears in the beginning, and even after it became routine its forbidding resistance was not forgotten; it was a cruelty. Nine, uttered, was the cry of a bird. Written 9, it rolled easily from the hand and was a maker of joy. It was the consummation of numbers, the last of its kind, the end of the series. After it the numbers were patched together of those already learned, a poverty of ideas. Its multiplication table was the most beautiful in song with its receding scheme of backward-counting adornments that played through the forward-going lilt of rising quantities.

One day in the assembly the chief professor asked questions, preparing for a day of patriotism. Only the little children might answer.

"Where was the birthplace of Christopher Columbus?"

MOME is disposed now, it is not a place now, is an

actual substance as it was in the beginning, is become entirely what it always was. It has lost its delusion. No one ever called it now by a name.

It is the four-arc'd clock of the seasons ticking its tick-tock around the year, and it is the mid-winter spring song of the joree bird, the Carolina wren, when he tee-teenle tee-teenle tee-deets on a high bare bough on a bright morning in January, spring not being here, not being there, not being anywhere.

It is the will to say, the power never being sufficient, the reach toward the last word—less than word, half-word, quarter-word, minimum of a word—that shrinks more inwardly and farthest toward its center when it is supplicated, that cries back, “Come,” or “Here, here I am,” when it is unsought. It is the act of looking when the mirror of the earth looks back into a creature, back into quickened nerves and raw sensitive feelers that run to the ends of a town, gray and white threads, living threads, knotted into a net and contrived to catch and to hold pleasure and pain, chiefly to hold pain.

It is the beauty of the thing itself welling up within itself continually in a constant rebirth, a resurrection. At any point it partakes of the whole nature of itself —like an onion.

It is nobody's useless old cat, having been stoned three times to death and left by boys in a tin-can heap at the bottom of a gully in Dee Young's pasture, arising, one eye hanging by a thread, to cry “meauw” .

on a woman's kitchen doorstep and to drink warm milk from a brown saucer.

It is the wide-opened jaw of a hound blowing hot breath on a little field beast and crying a howled curse on the perfidy of escape. It is a wave of hard shadows running over dried grass and winter stubble under a vast warted sky, the rabbit having taken to the brush heap at the field's end. It embraces the new food and the new hunger. It is in part a man, a farmer, walking across his pasture in midsummer singing a song he himself is making as he goes kicking his work shoes through the grass, singing, "Loo loo lo lo hum bang fi oo," singing "Old Whosoever Will is walken on the top of the meadow," a cattle farmer, a breeder of Shorthorns, ten years hence or now, singing a mediæval altarpiece over the heads of his cows and tramping through a field of a here unnamed community of flowers out of which the great bee eats. It is a farmer, the same, Caleb Burns, a farmer of fine cattle, a cattle husbandman, walking among his barns or over his pastures making the beginnings of songs or butchering a young beef for food: he would, with his men to help, stab the young beast at the throat and hang it to bleed, one of his men catching the blood in a bucket, a bucket of blood running out of a young beef, warm stuff, sickening to the smell, stuff that nice people fear. Caleb Burns, son of George Burns and Rose Hamilton, an experienced husbandman knowing foolishness and loss,

or a young man beginning his way, Caleb Burns singing a song.

Of the curbs and the streets, the lamp-posts and the street crossings, the drama of the court day, all the people kept a sense that these had been there a very long time, that these were the eternal marks of the earth and the ways by which man recognized himself in life. The town was but a little over a hundred years old, and back of that lay the wilderness; but few of the people knew how recently the town had begun. "Out of Virginia," "Away back long ago," were sayings in their vague accounts of themselves. The marks they had put upon the wilderness were older than any of the people could tell or the race remember and had been brought whole from some other life.

The roads ran out from the town toward other towns, roads known now as hard streamers of yellow earth and broken stones, inviting going, winding among the rolling farms and lost in remote regions where unfamiliar hills came down toward alien fences and gathered here and there a curious tree or made off toward a distant unmeasured horizon. In the farms Jersey cattle or Shorthorns grazed, the last the red of the old Patton stock, brought from Virginia. The farmers came to town and thus brought the roads back to the streets

and the lanes, came driving wagons laden with tobacco or hay or wheat or corn, and the cattle-men brought steers along the roads or the traders drove in the sheep, the spring lambs crying all June through the streets as they were flocked from day to day at the commons around the shipping pens.

For the people of Hill Street, there was only one season and that was summer, warm, seasonable, lush with rain, the season of easy living and song. Against this was set an anti-season, a not-existence, negative, cruel, hard with poverty and cold and insufficient food —winter. Life then was suspended. Begetting and bearing went forward through this negative period because the law was established by which they progressed, but life which sustained these waited, dull, suffering, and monotonous.

One spring the negroes began to dig long trenches through the streets to lay water pipes through the town. The white people were having water hydrants put into their gardens and houses, the water to be pumped from a reservoir which was being made between two hills far up in the farms above the town. In the houses bathrooms were erected at the ends of back porches or upper hallways. There was work for every black laborer in the building of the dam and the digging of the trenches through the streets and roads. The negroes at the picks would sing now and then, not in unison, but each one would cry out his song, a phrase or a rhyme, timed to the regular throb

of the body as it hammered with the tool upon the beaten earth, the song falling an instant behind the blow of the arm in half-humorous comment.

Whe-en I me-a-rry the-en I will
Ma-ake my ho-ome in E-evansville. . . .

The song was always heard to the steady fall of the pick or the rise of the shovel, syncopated so that it set the shovel apart from itself and but half-owned its rhythms, or rather as if it accepted its confines and then escaped from them by the witty loophole of a quarter-beat. The men who worked were the strong men of the town, brown men or yellow, men who worked as teamsters, handlers of stone, lumber, coal, brick. They were named Wade Spalding, Ben MacVeigh, Ross, Tom Rusty, and there was a man called Gluco. Joe Davis was among them, a man prodigious of strength. Ross was a large man, young at that time, brown-skinned and broad in shoulders. All of them were willing, if they were paid well and well watched, to do a day's work. A song would cry out from beneath the throb of the picks, escaped from the hard rhythm of the labor.

Chicken in the tree
Nobody there but me. . . .

A wailing minor slurred through infinite intervals from tone to tone, sliding on the word "there" down four semitones of the scale by gradations unknown to es-

tablished song. As a sequel to this some other voice would offer, after a space with the thud of the picks, the deeply intoned fatalism, swifter than the last, major, without wailing.

Hounds on my track
Chicken on my back.

Ross was a tall broad young negro, not over-sized, but well-knit and strong, his weight about one hundred and sixty pounds. He maintained a rivalry with Wade Spalding at the business of the picks, neither of them deigning to outdo himself but each taking pride in what he could achieve, foot by foot, by using as little of his strength as he might. Each negro used but the cream of his vitality on the labor, working relaxed, saving himself for life and her uses. A song, called out quickly,

Nigga, nigga, what can you do?
I can line a track,
Pull a jack;
I can pick and shovel too.

Water for bathing was being piped into all the better houses of the town, but few people would drink water from the pipes. Pump water, water from cisterns and wells, was better liked. The cisterns were not yet to be discarded. Wade had cleaned many a cistern and well. He would go down into the drained reservoir and dip up the sediments of mud to send it aloft in buckets.

He would sop up the last of the water with cloths and rinse again with fresh water. No one sang at a lonely task such as this. Song flowed best when the men worked together in a long line, the picks and shovels rising and falling.

Look down that dirt-road,
Far as I could see.
Saw a jail door. . . .
Look like home to me.

ONE

FREQUENTLY a well-used, high buggy was seen on the streets of the town, a vehicle of a slightly unfamiliar type, bought perhaps in some remote market. It would turn slowly around before the county offices and stand all afternoon under the shade of the tree at the doorway, a privileged conveyance. It was drawn by a well-conditioned horse, a tall bay that would step daintily along the stones of the street, and turn the wheels carefully. The owner, Mr. Tom Singleton, would buy easily at the stores, careless of bargains, asking for the best. Sometimes he would talk all afternoon with Anthony Bell, sitting on the gallery of the white house or under the elm tree. If Tom Singleton's wife, Miss Doe, were present she would give great care to her leave-taking. She would mount to the buggy with ceremonious ease and seat herself, smiling at the accomplished act, scarcely belonging to the event, her smile lingering until the need for good-byes obliterated her inner vision of herself. She was a sister to Anthony Bell. Her name, Theodosia, had been shortened to Doe. The Singleton farm was ten miles from the town, northwest, down the valley.

Sometimes Mr. Tom would come to town in a car-

riage drawn by two fine brown mules. Then he would take Anthony Bell and the two girls, Theodosia and Annie, back to the farm for a visit.

The two mules trotted down the Quincy pike in the bright widely-spread glow of a late morning, the waves of heat rolling up from the macadam and turning about among the cooler undulations that flowed from the tall corn of the fields. Eight miles from the town and the carriage left the Quincy pike and entered a crossroad, and here the mules walked slowly under the roadside trees. The stone wall at the right was rich with moss and shadows. Two miles along this way, and Tom Singleton's gate was set into the stone wall. Beyond, and the mules trotted evenly up a gravel road under American elms that were widely placed, the driveway leading to the farmhouse. Pines, lindens, locusts, tulip poplars and elms grew about the house in a pleasant confusion. The fox hounds, great mongrel beasts, walked in and out over the portico. From somewhere toward the rear a great jack, the breeding stallion, was braying at the arrivals.

"You can take the west room," Miss Doe said, standing with her hands folded before her body when she welcomed her guests, when she had kissed each little girl as was her duty. "Anthony, he can take the east room. Lucas will carry up the valises."

Upstairs Theodosia showed Annie the high bed in which they were to sleep, and in the east room another bed, as high, for their grandfather. They would lean

out the window to look far over the west hills where other farms lay stretched over the rolling earth, white-fenced barnyards and remote houses about which old trees had gathered. The avenue down to the stone wall and the white gate turned lightly with its elm trees, the way they had come. They would look at the photographs of former Bells and Trotters and Montfords on the chamber walls, and would gaze at a chromo print of a ship standing above a great sea, caught suspended upon a wave. Once they explored all the upper rooms, opening all the doors, and finding a staircase to the attic, they went there to peer out at the land of the farms, thinking that they could see a hundred miles away. Annie was six years old. She would look at Theodosia for confirmation of each new wonder, as if she would say, "And is it so? Is it real?"

Theodosia saw her aunt's vague hostility to her grandfather where it was carefully shawled under her function as hostess. The aunt would mount the stairs to see that all had been made neat in the rooms above, the visit an ostentation, reserved until the guests were at hand.

A negro girl, Prudie, cooked the meals, passing quickly from the cooking range to the tables, to the pantry. Her face shaded from one brown to another and the sweat ran in the neat wrinkles across her neck. She seemed neither glad nor sorry the guests had come. Miss Doe would give her pans of flour, sugar, or meal, or cuts of ham, all from the locked storeroom. "Be sure

to take out a plenty," she would say at the door, the keys in her fingers. When the uncle and the grandfather were away for a meal those left at home were served in the breakfast-room behind the dining-room, and Prudie instead of Lucas carried in the food. One day soon after the visit began Miss Doe sent the children to carry a message to a cabin back in the farm. Theodosia knew the way, for she had been for a walk in that direction with her uncle. There were clouds in the sky threatening a shower, and the aunt told the little girls to take the old cotton umbrella from the back porch.

They walked across the pasture and climbed over a gate into a cornfield, and it was pleasant to walk under the umbrella, treading on the shadow that moved with them down the field. The path was well beaten, for Prudie lived in the cabin with her mother, Aunt Deesie, and with Uncle Red. The cabin stood in a cove under some trees, a place where two hills began. Aunt Deesie was washing clothes in the yard, and all the lines were filled with white things hung to dry. A great kettle of boiling clothes steamed over a wood fire on the ground. The air about was pleasantly cool from the wooded hills behind the house, and a pleasant odor of lye soap spread about when the boiling kettle was dipped of its garments. Aunt Deesie was tall and strong, and she moved slowly among the tubs and kettles, keeping an even gait. On a quilt safely removed from the fire a small baby lay asleep, and two other small children ran

about the yard or clung to Aunt Deesie's skirt when Theodosia gave her message. These were Prudie's children.

"Yes'm," Aunt Deesie said. "Tell your Aunt Doe she didn't send me down no blues. To clear the white clo's. Tell your Aunt Doe all the blues is gone, the bluen."

Theodosia stood about in the cool of Aunt Deesie's yard, fascinated by the work that went forward and by the sweet smell of the lye, by the smell of Aunt Deesie's warm body leaning over the tubs. The baby waked and squirmed on the quilt, working its arms and legs about, and Aunt Deesie stopped her washing to pin a fresh rag about its hips, trying to hide what she did because the rag was old and without a hem. Theodosia saw her slip the soiled rag under the wash-bench and she was fascinated by her shame. The baby was dark brown, a boy child, and the two that ran about under Aunt Deesie's feet were girls, their heads a tight nap of thin wool. Aunt Deesie would push them gently aside and move from tub to tub, her voice gentle as she worked.

"Why don't you-all chil'n talk to the white gals. White gals come to see you-all."

The little negroes would stare with strange dark faces, their mouths going up and down as they chewed at their fingers. Theodosia would watch every move they made, curious, following them, or she would go back to the quilt to watch the baby. She would watch

their small dresses, their brown legs, their moving gestures, and she would ask them questions to pretend to an interest in their replies, but her pleasure was in her own sense of superiority and loathing, in a delicate nausea experienced when she knelt near the baby's quilt.

"Katie, why don't you pick up the baby's gum rattle offen the ground and give it to him into his hand," Aunt Deesie said. "Pick up the baby's rattler, Katie."

The child gave the rattle to the baby, and in the act Theodosia knew a sweet loathing of the small dark infant and knew that she herself could not be brought to touch it or to touch Katie. She knew the half-pleasant disgust felt for the young of another kind, a remote species. Their acts sent little stabs of joy over her, sickly stabs of pleasant contempt and pride.

THE week at the farm was always full of enhanced being. She would see her grandfather under the wooden pillars of the portico and see him in his joyous encounters with his old friend. Away from home he flowered into some newer intensity, and his rusty clothes were elegant against the rough running landscape. The office of host became Tom Singleton well, and Anthony as guest responded. Doe Singleton's hostility to her brother did not penetrate his joy or reduce it or shape it in any part. She scarcely existed for it at all, for she

seemed unrelated to everything present. The dinner waited until she came, Lucas going and coming, bringing something more, seeming to spread the time of preparation about until she appeared. When she arrived she came hurrying through the door and sat at the head of the board. She seemed to be sitting too far from the table and neglecting her own ease. She handled the cups without routine or precision, but she poured each cup herself and gave it to Lucas, who conveyed it to its place. She would ask Anthony how many spoons of sugar he took, seeming to forget each time that the amount had been established.

"You're welcome to all the sugar you want. Pass Mr. Anthony the sugar bowl," she would say to Lucas. "And get Mr. Tom the sharp knife. That's not the right knife. They say sugar is bad. For grown people, it's said." She would not let her hostility extend to any controversy over the food. Sitting after the serving was done, she seemed unrelated to her knife and fork, to her cup, even when her hand lifted it to her mouth to drink.

"When I go next time I think I'll take nothing along but Blix and Tim and Roscoe," Tom Singleton said. "I never cared for a big set-to of dogs when I hunt. Give me three or four good dogs. What's the use?"

"Blix is the smartest dog in the whole lot," Anthony said. "That dog Blix has got first-rate brains inside his skull. One time . . ."

"Brains! He's the stupidest one in the whole pack,

the way I look at it," Miss Doe said. "Blix hasn't got one grain of sense. Since he was a pup he's been the stupidest one in that litter."

"We'll go down after dinner and look over the yearlen mules," Tom Singleton said. "I just want to hear what you'll say about my yearlens." He was glad in his guest, unaffectedly gracious, the sweetness of his smile giving a flavor to every word he spoke. He was childishly nervous in his care of each hospitality. "As pretty a bunch of mules as ever was. But I just want your opinion. You're a prime judge of stock, that I well know."

Like his friend, Anthony, he seemed unaware of Miss Doe's denials. Their entire unconsciousness of this led Theodosia to distrust her own sense of the house, the furniture, the shading trees in the garden as seen from the windows of the dining-room. Lucas walked slowly about the table, his passing timed to some unreality that colored her whole vision. Her joy in being there spread widely about her and suffused her knowledge of her aunt's way until she was scarcely sure that she was there at all, scarcely sure that Annie was real or that her grandfather was of the same flesh she had always known him to be. She could touch Annie but was she the same, she questioned, that she had touched before and was she herself present? Her joy in the farm and her pain in her aunt could not interfuse. The talk, as something extra and beyond her reach, flowed about the dogs, the coming elections, or it would

drift away to market prices or to books they had read, to the gossip of the town.

"Downing, he's the best man. I aim to vote for the best man this time," Tom Singleton said.

Lucas walked evenly about with a dish of some scalloped food, passing it from place to place. Miss Doe spoke then, acquiescing; Downing was, she said, a good man, a good clever man. The county could see what he had in him when he was magistrate. The trees outside moved lightly in the air, green moving against blue in a motion which flowed continually, never returning, some unfamiliar tree which settled a new rhythm into Theodosia's mind, and a passion to know all of this strange thing exalted her being as she glanced again toward the window where the boughs stood across a meadow and a field and passed thus to the blue of the horizon.

"And Bond in his way is all right," Anthony said. "For the place he's expected to fill. And Johns is a right clever man now. Honest, he is, and fair-spoken."

"I never yet saw any good in old Johns," Miss Doe said, "and Bond, he's not one whit better. If that's what you call honest! I know a tale would make his honesty blush, and you know it too, Anthony Bell."

It seemed to Theodosia then that the air would split asunder with a great crash, the flaw centering in her aunt's hands and extending two ways across the solid of the room. She glanced at her uncle in distress and apprehension. His smile then was open and tender, and

he reached across and touched her hand with his palm while he finished saying something to her grandfather, and then he said:

“What does Ladybug want? I know what’ll be good for her. Doe, le’s pour some more cream in her milk, outen the cream pitcher. Take this glass around to Miss Doe, Lucas. She needs it to grow on. Growen like a weed now, Ladybug is. What does Little Lady want on her plate? Doe, Little Lady’s got not one thing on her plate.”

THE memories of his college sat lightly upon his mind, guests indulgently entertained when they were given any recognition. He had never overtaken the attitude of learning. Anthony would bring some book to the portico and read aloud, or he would say, “Do you remember Thomas, old Thomas?” A professor in some college he would mean. “English letters . . . He loved it too well to teach it well. . . .” The aunt would sit with her hands folded in her lap, a smile that scarcely belonged to her lips hovering over the bent hands while the man’s voice intoned the sumptuous lines. She had heard him read all this before, but she lent herself gracefully to the act, and Tom Singleton lowered his head, remembering, or he would glance up at Anthony’s face when some new guest arrived and was joyously greeted and housed for the time in elegant chambers. The reading:

Three thousand years of sleep unsheltered hours.

Anthony Bell's hair was thinly grizzled. His hands were familiar upon the book, his voice well-used to the words of the poets. Vertical lines lay parallel across his cheeks. His mouth was thin-lipped and shut down at the corners with drooping plumes, feathered lines that frayed out upon the skin.

Tramping the slant winds on high
With golden-sandalled feet that glow. . . .

Theodosia thought sometimes, when he read aloud, seeing his moving mouth running perpetually along the channels of song, that he must know some eternals, some truths, some ways unknown to her, and she would yearn with an inner sob of longing that he might impart this thing to her, whatever it might be. It was known to his body rather, to his delicate hands bent lovingly at the edges of a book, his sitting posture, his mouth that rolled out the elegant words and was unafraid of any word or saying. She would sit quietly among these, her elders, trying to understand, gaining a rich exaltation where the words revealed their splendor even if they withheld their thought. She was eleven years old.

These are Jove's tempest-walking hounds
Whom he gluts on groans and blood. . . .

When the old man spoke suddenly after a period of quiet a tiny spray of spittle would sometimes fly from his ill-balanced teeth. In rest his thin-lipped mouth bent

downward at the corners and imposed its angles upon the lower cheeks. She did not know it then, but his mouth had been closed by sorrow. "By God, Shelley was no jackass," he said, snapping shut the book.

Annie had brought the paper dolls to the doorsill, hinting for play. Theodosia joined her there and began to stand the long, slim ladies in rows against the house, half gravely, half in frolic, wavering between Annie and the men, her grave way belonging to Annie. The hour had been rich and dark with the voices from the poem. Now Annie's soft child-speech fell high and thin about the matters of the paper images of women and girls, the chirping of some familiar bird.

"I wish you-all had brought the fiddle," Tom said. "I'm just sick for a little fiddle music myself. Tony, you got no call to come down here without you bring along your music. Next time you come you got to play a double quantity just because you forgot this time to fetch it along."

"Too many people sit around and do nothing all day as 'tis," Miss Doe said.

"I recall how you used to play Heart Bowed Down and Lucy Lammermoor. 'Farewell, farewell my own true love.' I recall one night . . ."

"It's Theodosia plays the fiddle now," Anthony said. "I give over now to the young hoss. Plays, egad, yes she does. Takes right after it."

Theodosia turned to the paper dolls with grave willingness and preoccupation. Her blood flowed warmly

because of the praise, spreading over her like a soft mantle.

THE girls went for a walk with their uncle one bright mid-morning, going to a tobacco barn which stood down in a creek valley beyond two fields. Of the dogs, Blix and Roscoe were allowed, and they ran smelling at the path, quietly humble when they were called. The other dogs were locked into the old apple house, the place where they were kept when they were not wanted running about, where they were seasoned for the hunt.

Some abundance within herself would not let Theodosia acquiesce completely to the hour, to any hour or to any experience, as being sufficient. She kept on the way a pleasant sense of her grandfather sitting reading under the pine before the house, knowing a curious joy in his absence and enjoying the walk more intensely in that she enjoyed it for him as well as for herself. The corn in the field was very high, near its maturing. Tom Singleton wondered and delighted in the height of the corn. His pride in the high corn seemed then to touch her vague distrust of pride and delight, and she smiled with him happily, swinging his hand.

“Some of it fifteen feet high, Ladybug, if it’s one inch. Have to tear the shock down to pluck it.”

A humming came from one end of the cornfield, audible as they passed, and there myriads of bees were

working over the corn tassels, taking the pollen of the corn. A walnut tree glistened in the light. The edges of the leaves made crystals on the green bank of the tree, sharp facets of brightness on green leaves. Theodosia did not know the name of this hard, brilliant tree, but she knew some response to the scintillating surfaces and lined edges where the sun met the leaves.

"This-here, it's a walnut tree. A fine old walnut," he said. "And what's this, Ladybug?"

"That's the queen-anne's-lace-handkerchief," he said when she could not reply. The name was itself a bright altar-cloth for some shrine in a valley, and Theodosia grew in all ways to comprehend the beauty of the weed, but insufficiency grew likewise, moving outward beyond every comprehended meaning and pleasure.

Some buzzards were soaring over the stream, lying out on the air with long wings, searching the water-holes for fowls that might come there to drink. They seemed rather to rest on the air and to turn about for the mere happiness of turning. Near the creek a pool of water, fed by some spring, had been banked about with earth to make a pond, the place where the mules drank when the creek was low and the water-holes foul. Four light sorrel horses stood by the fence, one of them a large glossy mare with a half-grown mule colt beside her, the colt sorrel and brilliant like the mother. It seemed very foolish in its fright, edging close to its mother's side, afraid even of little Annie when she ran

near to gather the plush, aster-like flowers that grew near the creek.

In the field the laborers were bending over the tobacco plants, breaking out the top of each and trimming away undesired growth. They lifted their backs from the labor to watch the passing and to greet the owner of the field. At the barn beyond the field Tom left the girls in the shade of the doorway while he looked at the walls of the building, or he climbed high into the upper structure, talking happily to himself as he mounted. It was a good barn, he said. It would do. A little work on the roof and a few nails to tighten the loose scantlings. Then they went back along the tobacco field and passed the shy sorrel colt again.

"Oh, it's a good morning," he said. "I someways like a day just like this, just enough heat so's you know it's summer. Cool breezes shiften in and out of the thicket and a Mockbird over towards the hill a-singen once in a little while. A prime good day. I don't know why it is but seems like I always liked a hilltop. We'll go up this-here fenceline and around home by the orchard to see if the early harvests are all gone offen the trees. That's a summer apple fit for a queen to eat."

They accepted his joy in them as their due and saw it blend with his joy in the morning. It had been but a little while since Annie had thought that if she darkened her eyes with her hand the sun went out and all the earth was in darkness. Suddenly a redbird made a solitary peal of song, a rich modulation from the three

high whistled notes to the low throaty altos of the decline where the singing darkened to meet the brush and undergrowth of the thicket. The song set the hill-top clear in a high relief.

"I sometimes plow this-here, but mainly I leave it in pasture grass." Beyond the fence the earth rolled gently up to a summit that held a few scattered trees, an oak and two or three thorns. "And on the top, right there on the summit, is where I expect to be buried, right there. Off to the left of the oak but on the summit like. From that-there spot you can see—it's curious now—you can see the whole farm, every last field. You can look down on the house and the barns and right down this-here valley to the creek. It's curious. There's where I expect to be buried some day. I always like family buryen-grounds. I expect to lay down my bones right there on this hilltop."

The hill-crest rolled in a fair curve against the sky between the limits of the trees, but it slipped beyond the trees again and sank away into the curving field, and Theodosia felt a quick pleasure in it as the place where he would be buried, and felt it as the summit of the farm that looked down upon all the fields and the meanderings of the creek and the life of the barns, on the singing mockingbird and the goodness of the day. Her eagerness ran forward and longed to have him buried there, anticipated his entombment on the brow of the hill he had chosen, so that she could scarcely wait for the consummation of his wish. She looked at him

happily and smiled, and he took her hand in some unconscious delight, and thus they walked up the fence path.

THEODOSIA would watch the long brown hand with its yellow shadowed nails when Lucas passed a plate of some food at her side. While she helped herself to a serving her eyes would cling to the hand where it folded at the edge of the plate, the thumb near the food, and she would remember the baby on the quilt in Aunt Deesie's yard. An exquisite disgust of the hand would make the food taste doubly sweet in her mouth when the hand was withdrawn.

"Well, *Ladybug*," Tom Singleton said when they had passed to the portico, "what's the best thing in the world?"

She had never thought before that one thing might be the best, superior to all other things, but when her uncle placed the question at once it became clear that among all the betters there must be one supreme best. She was bewildered in her pursuit of some reply, wanting to find the true answer, and she stared at the ground or at the wooden pillar, penetrating the query with the whole of her strength. Her uncle had turned to some other matter, he was talking with Anthony now—the foot-and-mouth disease, Henry Watterson, the tobacco pool in the dark district, *Mnemosyne*, the secret of the

mind, the price of sugar mules, and back to the pool again. The vine that spread over the brick walls of the house made a great plane of flowing green that turned with the turning wall and lapped over the south front and reached to the north gable. It had come from somewhere far away; her attention did not cling to the place as Anthony repeated it with wonder. The main stem of the vine grew on the south side of the house under the window of the room where the aunt and uncle lived, the room across the hall from the parlor, but the longest reach of it, at the farthest end of the west wall, was a hundred feet or more from the root. It was as if it were a great tree, flattened and attenuated to a vine and bent about a house, and her grandfather and uncle were two children in their simple delight in the great growth. Doe had brought it from some place far away a long while ago. From Virginia. She had come back from a visit there and had brought the vine wrapped in a bit of earth, delicately rooted in soil. She was proud now of the vine and of herself as its author.

“See, Tony,” she said. “See.”

They walked about the house to the north wall and traced the creeper to its last and most remote tendril high at the eaves above the north attic window, calling, “See here!”

“See, Tony,” she said. “A hundred feet and over since it touched ground.”

They seemed sweetly childish in their pleasure in

the vine and Theodosia looked at them with wonder and detachment. The best thing in the world teased her for a reply. She saw that her aunt had cared for the vine and had become actual and present in her pride of it. She had brought it from a long distance and had cared for it along the way in the train, giving it water. It had come from the wall of some relative in Virginia. She turned to Mnemosyne, for the beautiful word came again and again to her ear once her grandfather had named it. He had told her of it before, Memory, the mother of all, the seed of the mind. It was a curious question, the query her uncle had made, as simple as breath; she thought that all the people in the world must know the answer or must be in pursuit of the answer to a question of such importance—the best thing in the world. She wondered if Mnemosyne might not be the answer, the best, and her mind swam dizzily in a sense of vaguely remembered beautiful words, their ideas ill-shaped, words remembered more for their beauty of tone than for their thought—aspodel, Mytilene. But there were other beautiful things, other best things. They eluded her, unnamed, receding down a long vista into her inner sight. She recalled particular occasions when the surrounding world had seemed good, a good place in which to be. Admiring words from others, caresses, gifts, all the people singing in the church—in the seed of each happening an insufficiency. There was never enough,

They were on the portico again, the mottled shadows of the boughs falling on their faces. The voices became sharp and firm, pleasantly outlined, immense, governed by some relation to the vine on the wall and its great reach from the soil of the ground. In the moment all the people present became actors in a pageant and all the words they said seemed deeply significant as if they were proclaiming themselves now in their real and permanent, unillusory aspect, in their true cause and relation. Annie lay in the doorway with a picture book. Anthony Bell was talking, his hand upraised. Lucas came from the kitchen garden with a respectful message, affected embarrassment, his head bowed, the proper approach. Their voices stood with length and breadth, sharply edged.

EVERY day or two Theodosia would ask her aunt if she and Annie might go to see Aunt Deesie. The walk across the pasture and the cornfield was long, but the pleasure of Aunt Deesie's yard was sweet. Aunt Deesie ironed the clothes, heating the irons on the open embers of the fire that burned in the yard. The baby always lay on the quilt and the small girls stood bashfully about. One day Theodosia took them some of the candy Tom Singleton had brought from the store. She could scarcely endure the joy of her loathing as she touched their fingers in giving them the sweets.

Near the end of the week Miss Doe went away in the buggy early in the afternoon and Tom and Anthony played checkers under the pine tree. The dogs walked about sleepily in the bright air, which was of the radiance of early autumn, or they slept in the shaded doorway of the barn. The day moved slowly and her stay at the farm seemed to Theodosia to be bent or deflected from its purposes. Little Annie wanted to play with the dolls, but Theodosia grew weary of them. The kitchen was closed; there was no drama being done there; no one was feeding the stock at the barns or fastening the dogs into the apple house. She wandered back to the pine tree where the game of checkers went happily along, but it could not entertain her. She whispered to Annie as they went behind the house in their search for something to do.

“We’ll go to see Aunt Deesie.”

They took the cotton umbrella from the back porch although there were no clouds. The memory of the first visit should tinge this adventure. They crossed the pasture in the brilliant sun and entered the cornfield, but when they were scarcely started along the path by the corn Annie said that she was thirsty and that she must have a drink, and she cried. She could not go farther without a drink, she said. Theodosia urged her on and promised a drink at Aunt Deesie’s cabin. When they left the cornfield and came near the cove a strange aspect of the place accosted them, for it was closed and still. All the tubs were neatly piled beside the door,

their bottoms turned up, and the clotheslines were gone. They shouted from the small gate but the house was empty. Aunt Deesie and the children were gone. The place was frightful crouched under its loneliness.

Annie cried again and said that she was thirsty and Theodosia went into the wooded hill behind the cabin to try to find the spring, but she did not look for a path and her search led them far up the hillside but gave them nothing. It was cool under the trees and Annie forgot her need for the water. Presently they saw two small animals, and Annie ran after them, calling them her little cats. The small beasts ran close to the ground and kept together. They were strange creatures and they made the wooded hill seem strange to Theodosia, as if she had never seen it before. Annie herself seemed strange, having forgotten her thirst now in an ecstasy of pleasure over the little animals, which she tried to catch with her hands.

"They're little doggies," she said. "They're my little cats."

Theodosia tried to catch them too, and she closed her hands upon them once, but they were elusive and quick although they seemed unable to run very fast. They ran along, tumbling at each other, keeping together. Theodosia knelt quickly and spread her skirt before them, but they turned aside and ran away. Then suddenly they went into a hollow stump through a little hole at the side, and Theodosia poked the umbrella into the hole and Annie called, "Come out, little doggies," but

a cat-like hiss came from the stump and when Theodosia jerked the umbrella away a quick paw shot out and a snarl followed. The girls ran away from the stump, afraid of it, and presently they went back toward the cornfield. The sun was low now and they hurried across the pasture. They had not asked leave to go.

At the end of the pasture where the fodder stalks were scattered near the feeding ricks two of the dogs came toward them, Blix and Lady, and in an instant Theodosia knew that they were not coming for play. Blix and Lady and Roscoe were coming fast upon them, full speed now, rushing down the littered pasture, their eyes set and their jaws opened, their backs a straight line. Theodosia screamed and caught Annie's hand as she ran, and the dogs were upon them, five beasts now. She dropped the umbrella and turned screaming toward the barn, dragging Annie, and Uncle Red came from the cattle shed and shouted something. The dogs stopped at the umbrella and set upon it with their teeth and tore it to pieces at once, but the delay gave Theodosia time to come near the barn before they set upon her again. All the dogs were out now, a dozen or more, some of them worrying the torn pieces of the umbrella and some in a pack around the girls. Uncle Red beat them away with a rail and carried Annie to the house, for she was weak with terror.

"Um—m! Skunk!" he said. "That-there skunk. Has you-all youngones been handlen a skunk or a polecat maybe?"

Theodosia remembered the terror and fury in the eyes of the dogs and all through the evening she sat quietly with a book she tried to read. Annie cried out in her sleep many times during the night. The next day the dogs were locked in the apple house, but Annie would not go beyond the doorway unless she held her grandfather's hand. Soon afterward the week came to an end and the visit was over.

THE ladies of the town played a game with cards, a simple game that did not prevent conversation. On the day of the card party there was a faint flutter in the town, the ladies riding by in phaëtons and traps, wearing their best. If Charlotte Bell entertained the group she would, at some time during the party, sit at the piano with Theodosia standing near, and they would play some simple part of an overture or a popular air. The Bell house was a white frame structure to which several additions had been built, a long portico or gallery running almost the entire length of the front giving a pleasant open space above stairs as well as below where one might take the air. On summer evenings Charlotte would sit for a while on the upper gallery with the two girls and sing, sitting apart from the house where Horace Bell came and went lightly, never troubling to hide his destination whether it was a gambling party with men or an evening with some

woman. Seen once at dusk as she sat on the upper gallery, her head against the bank of vines, her two little girls grouped close about her to sing, she had looked like the pitying madonna diverted by hate. She had wanted a rightly-placed hearth. Now she played much with Theodosia, their simple airs arising above the quiet of the street. Horace, departing, would wave them a gay farewell, a greeting that was all of himself, lightly given, or once in a while he would stop briefly beside the piano and join his great voice to the song, booming the words across the fiddle notes, taking a pride and a delight in his great running voice that emasculated the piano. When he had made his point he would leave in a thunder of laughter, waving a hasty good-bye.

When Annie was seven years old she sickened of a fatal child malady and died. The funeral was held in the church, and Luce wept when she saw the Bells weeping as they sat near together at the front of the church in the space respectfully left for the mourners, seeing them huddled together and set apart by death. The minister preached of the kingdom of heaven, the world to come, and of becoming as a little child. A lady, Mrs. Bent, sang a song while the organ hummed softly. She was full-breasted and maternal, and as she sang she looked as if she only a moment before had held a child in her arms, and the words of the song seemed truer as she sang them, truer than the sayings of the minister to which they lent truth. Her own children sat with their father in a pew at the side, and

the words of the song came very gently across the church as she looked as if some child might easily creep into her arms.

I think when I read that sweet story of old,
Of Jesus while here among men,
How He took little children as lambs to His fold . . .

The words were of her own, coming from her soft bosom and her strong round arms. The Bells, Anthony, Charlotte, Horace, and Theodosia, sat huddled together to weep, remote from the others of the church, sitting forward. They could not hear the words of the song as Miss May Bent sang it, as she sent it from her warm, kind body, they being too near to the whole of the event. In Charlotte Bell was the song itself, waiting. She could not hear the singing. Theodosia heard it as a bright myth having some celestial, candle-lit meaning she could not understand.

THEODOSIA was delicately modeled with strong slender limbs, swift in a game, quick-witted at play. Her red-brown hair hung in a long braid or was twined braided about her head. Her fingers were small and thin, bent strangely about a fiddle, were quick among the fiddle strings, weighted with music. Little Annie's grave was marked now by a small white stone in the graveyard, a stone which read only the name, ANNIE, in hard let-

ters set deeply into the marble. To see Theodosia was to think of the child and to wonder if she had forgotten. As she ran down the ball field where the boys and girls played together, as swift as the best of the girls, the act would question if she had forgotten. As she bent her fingers over the fiddle strings and pressed them down in cunning ways, her knowing fingers keen with music, the act again would test her memory of the small girl.

The people of the town were assembled at the chapel hall of the Seminary to hear the school choruses and solo pieces, the last day of the term. The piano had been tuned and its dark squat legs had been polished, an effort made to remove all blemishes and all dust. There were pieces recited and some bits of dialogue given. When Theodosia had finished playing, Anthony Bell went forward and lifted her down from the platform and kissed her, proud of her applause. "Her playen, it's not so much," voices in the throng said. "I've heard better fiddle-playen." Hostile voices, and then another, "But fine for a child only fourteen, right good for a child now." "Right good for anybody, I'd say. I only wish I could do half as well." "But it sounds like exercises." "It's classical music. It all sounds like that, classical music does." "Classical music all sounds alike." "Give her another encore. It pleases old Mr. Bell." "It pleases him too much. He's a vain old man." "But do it no matter. It's right sweet the way he takes on over Dosia's playen. He's given her his fiddle and they say it's one of the finest in the whole state. It's a

famous fiddle, they say. Give another encore." "He says he aims to send her off to learn from a high teacher, away off somewhere, and he may do it." "It would take a sight of money to do that." "They may manage it somehow. Give another encore." "She's a-goen to play again. He may manage it." "I for one hope so." "She's right sweet with her fiddle up to her chin like that." "She's as sweet as a picture. I just love to sit here and watch her."

CHARLOTTE BELL died one cold season when the town was numb and bewildered with the unaccustomed freezing. Few could realize her loss. When the mild days reappeared she was somehow gone from the gallery.

Old Anthony Bell walked the garden path in the early morning in a soiled smoking-jacket, stiff-legged, his eyes dim. Theodosia went to school at the Seminary, or she practised at the fiddle half the day, exploring music without guidance. She studied harmony at the school and assembled a small group there to play quartets, her quick skill dominating. She grew tall in a year. Her rounded breasts were up-tilted—two small graceful cups—as if they would offer drink to some spirit of the air. She ran swiftly from one thing to the next, the books in her grandfather's cases, the fiddle, the games with the other girls. "This," her grandfather said to her, "is the family tree of the Mont-

fords and the Trotters. There's a collection of family traditions written into the blank book on the second shelf. My mother was a Montford, and don't you forget that, Miss."

She read the notes in the book of records swiftly one hour while she waited for a dance at the tobacco warehouse. She had learned to kiss with her first lover, but she had learned to kiss more deeply with her second, one of the boys at the Seminary, Charles Montgomery. In the kitchen at the back of the house she would bake a cake or make a pudding to augment Aunt Bet's plain dinner, the cook book propped up on the music rack she had set in the middle of the floor. Her slender legs leaped quickly from the pantry to the table, and she made emphases unconsciously with fiddle gestures, a long wooden spoon in her right hand. "The whites of five eggs, it says. Have we got five, Aunt Bet? Here's one says four whole eggs. All right, Aunt Bet. You fire up. Gentle at first, then big later on. Here we go."

The movements in the streets and along the roads were becoming more swift, and there were fewer horses in the pastures. "The horse business, it's ruined, plumb ruined, or soon will be," Anthony Bell said. Theodosia quarreled with Charles after slapping his face one night in early spring.

"You don't know what you want," he said.

"Maybe so," she said. She could feel her anger rising and spreading within, a subtle fuel in her body mount-

ing to a swift burning in her face. "Maybe so, but I know what I don't want."

Charles went away from the town at some time after that and did not return. Anthony was palsied in his hands, but he would stop in his stroll along the path and beat the ground sharply with his cane, tapping on the bricks or on the boards under his feet. "Oh, tut!" he would say. Sometimes Theodosia would see him in his mantle of old age as he stepped uncertainly along, and a pang of pity, self-pity, fear, and apprehension would assail her. Or, seeing his shrunken form, his feet questioning the path for a place, she herself would walk there and she would see through her present self as through a swift glass, quickly adjusted for vision, as would say, "See, bent spine, eyes fixed, gestures squared at their turnings, the up-and-down jog of age." But her life ran upon itself eagerly and there were other things to see.

He would begin to sing as formerly, letting his voice fall away to a whisper when it failed in its tone. "Oh, tut!" he would say, returning to mumble his old knowledge, reiterating himself endlessly. "Yet hath the shepherd boy at some times raised his rustic reed to rhymes more rumbling than rural, more rumbling than rural." Theodosia had won a diploma at the Seminary. She was a tall girl now, fragile but quick, swift at the girls' sports. "She must study to play the fiddle. She's a master fiddler," the old man said, stepping more briskly over the boards. "With rhymes more rumbling

than rural . . . She must. She gets her music two ways, Charlotte and the Trotters. Old Matthew Trotter was a master musicianer in his day, and had red hair. . . . Yet hath the shepherd boy. . . I'll see to the matter myself. . . A small matter, a few paltry dollars to buy instruction for a girl of talent. . . . Oh, tut! What became of the farmland, sixteen hundred broad acres, I had? Well, I'll say, ask her aunt Doe for the small sum. A rich farm, she's got, and not a chick or a child to spend on. 'Madam, your one namesake, your only godchild, has a rare musical gift. Madam, are you aware that your namesake has a bit of a musical talent? Has it ever occurred to you to give the child a gift, a year in the metropolis maybe? Madam! Your humble servant. Yours very truly, Anthony Bell. Give the child a big red apple. A peach plucked from the peach orchard. Send the child the first peach of the season. Namesake! For God's sake! Has it ever occurred to you, Madam, to do something you might call substantial for the baby, your namesake? If your husband, Tom Singleton, had lived it would occur to him. To reward his wife's namesake. God knows it would!' . . . Oh tut! . . . What became of the farmland, my patrimony? 'Young Man, your only daughter.' . . . God's sake! . . . As well talk to a jacksnipe. 'Horace, your daughter approaches her maturity lacken a few miserable pennies to buy her a bit of a finish in music.' I'll see to the matter myself."

TWO

A YOUNG woman named Jane Moore played accompaniments for Theodosia. They played in the parlor of the Bell house, the piano standing against the east wall and running back into the bay of the windows. Jane Moore laughed a great deal as she played, and she played many notes wrong, but she offered Theodosia a steady tinkle-tinkle of piano rhythms against which to set her fiddle. Over the chimney hung a steel engraving of Henry Clay in some congressional pose, and the insignia of the Trotters and the Montfords, done in color by some artist and neatly framed, hung near together on the north wall. Through the freshly curtained windows the scent of locust blossoms would come, and outside, from garden to garden, up the street, the locust trees had their flower.

Sometimes the piano outdid itself, as when Jane Moore was caught on some rapture which swept her beyond her nervous inattention. Then she would go steadily on, without a giggle or a blunder, one with Theodosia, the piano married to the fiddle, rhythm after rhythm, measure after measure, and Theodosia's fervid "Repeat!" as she struck the music with her bow and marched the melodies forward and marshalled

them forth, would hold the good spell to the end of the piece.

“Oh, Jane Moore, Jane Moore!” Theodosia would say. “Why in the name of the Lord, why can’t you play like that every day?”

They would laugh until their eyes ran tears, laughter induced by Jane Moore’s concentrated interval. She had soft white skin and a round soft body, an inattentive mind. It was, as the flowering locust trees attested, the spring of the year.

There were garden parties in the evenings, all the boys and all the girls gathering to laugh and joke and play with light caresses among the shrubs that were lit with paper lanterns. The girls would come walking with the young men, and their little shining shoes would tap on the village pavements. Catherine Lovell had curling yellow hair that stood in a soft roll on the top of her head, and in her bright organdie dress she was fair in the way of a pink in a garden. She was lovely to know, always coming to Theodosia with her smiles and her pretty little jokes, always wanting Theodosia to play her fiddle again. She would come running to Theodosia’s room on a morning after a party to talk over all the happenings of the occasion, and she would sit on the foot of the bed while Theodosia had her breakfast from the tray Aunt Bet had brought upstairs. Then they would tell over the names of all who had been present and repeat the bright sayings of the young men, Conway and Albert, whose

names they called often, and they would praise the girls for their loveliness in the fullness of their own self-admiration and self-love.

“Wasn’t May Wilmore a dear in her flowered sash?”

“Like a sweet pea,” Theodosia would say.

“Like a whole bouquet of little flowers.”

“And Ruth was sweet in her green dress, dark bands across her hair.”

Or Ruth Robinson would run in during the morning to ask Theodosia to go for a drive far into the country. Once they went to gather dogwood blossoms from a tree she knew of, far down the Quincy pike. They set out early in the afternoon and let the old horse take his own way of keeping clear of the few passing cars. In the end they went as far as the farm where Theodosia’s aunt lived. They talked with the old aunt in the musty parlor, sitting stiffly on the curve-backed chairs, and were scratched under the knees by the broken horse-hair cloth. Miss Doe brought a plate of stale little cakes for a treat. Somewhere back among the barns the useless old jack stallion would bray, and the great hounds, fat and indolent, would loll in the front doorway or wander through the rooms, sniffing at Theodosia’s dress again and again, or at Ruth’s slipper, dull-minded and slow, stretching stiffly by the parlor wall and returning to lie by the door and sleep. Tom Singleton was buried on the hilltop now. Miss Doe had had some need of him and when he was dead she mourned her loss with

a perpetual attention to his memory. She kept all the hounds he had used for his hunting although they grew old and some of them became half insane. She let them multiply without discrimination and gave them access to the rooms of the house where, Theodosia suspected, they chose their own kennels and made free of the house from the garret to the pantries.

Now Miss Doe was grateful to the girls for their call, for the long drive they had taken, and she passed the cakes about with a thin gayety. She asked after the health of Horace and of Anthony, but she would not ask the girls to stay for the night. She withheld any gossip of the farm, of new calves or colts or chickens, feigning that these matters were too common for the interest of the parlor, reticent to answer questions. "She doesn't want to share even the news of a new-dropped colt with me," Theodosia would think, biting the little cake.

"I think I'd like to look around the place a little, Aunt Doe," she said, when the call was near an end. "Could I look about a little? Could I show Ruth around, show her the vine? And the hilltop, maybe?"

"There's little to entertain town girls with on the place. You can go and see, though, whatever you think there is to see." She would laugh in a thin way, remaining indoors, peeping from behind the window curtains while they walked back into the farm.

The place was out of repair, and the dogs trampled it under. They were omnipresent, untrained, ill-

mannered brutes. They lay sprawling in the doorway or they cluttered the path to the barns. They came up from the cellar sniffing with hostile interest, unused to visitors. The vine had died from the west wall and hung there withered and untended. Tom Singleton was greatly missed from the place.

"I hope you found everything to suit you," Miss Doe said when they came back to the house door to say good-bye. "I hope you liked."

"She hates us because Grandfather sold his farm, or lost it somehow," Theodosia said as they drove down the avenue toward the road. "She hates us because she'll have to will us her land. We're the only natural heirs she's got. She hates to have to will us her property."

Returning along the road the girls filled the buggy with dogwood boughs, and they sang to remove the memory of the dismal hour of the farm, alto and soprano, running from one ditty to another, while the horse jogged up the pike toward the town. The rolling hills were fresh with spring, were sweetly curved with the tender new growth, and sweet again with the scent of herbs and dew. At the creek crossing the horse craved a drink, and Theodosia loosened the check-rein and let the beast step aside into the pool, gay over the act and eager to dispel the malice of the old hour. The weathered limestone of the creek bottom lay crumpled and fluted, a mass of tightly welded shells from some old ocean bed. The stream had cut

a wide valley for its use, had set the hills far back as it had chosen other beds in which to wander in other ages. The horse supped his drink from off the fluted rocks, and when he had got his fill, alto and soprano flowing anew around some sentimental air, they would jog higher up the broad valley and thus come home again to the town.

THE young men, Conway Brooke and Albert Stiles, would come to Theodosia's house singly or together. Coming together, they would beg her to play for them or they would bring sweets to eat. Conway calling alone would talk of himself, sitting happily in the dim light of the parlor and enjoying his heightened self, his ease, his good looks, Theodosia's beauty, all the delights of remembered being. Albert coming alone would grow heavily reminiscent, self-appraising, romantic, planning his future, laying his plans before her, eager for acquiescence. He was broad and strong, filling his chair with his man's frame. Another, Frank Railey, would stop casually on his way up or down the street, or he would take her to row on the pool beyond the town. He would bring his books to read portions aloud, bits of essay he admired, or verse from his favorite poets. He had studied law and was establishing himself in practice in the courts of equity. Persevering and conscientious, seeking to enrich his experience, he would seek talk with Anthony Bell,

bringing up old matters and trying to pry open the shut past, but this past was strange to him in its coloring, its iridescences which had long since been lost from recorded history, and these discussions would fall apart and leave old Anthony wrathful, gesticulating, straining to regain his composure. Theodosia often forgot engagements with Frank and was then put to elaborate pains to escape rudeness. When he faded down the vista of the street, going toward the town, he evaporated entirely, and she had no picture of where he went or of what he might do there. His face was slightly out of proportion, slightly unsymmetrical, and this characteristic gave it a look of rugged beauty and strength. He would come back out of the nowhere into which he had gone, smiling at Theodosia's door, his smile placed slightly to one side of his face, and she would cry out, "For heaven's sake, it's Frank!"

Conway was lovely in his approach and in his greetings, always offering a charming promise of some approximation. His soft accents were a blend of Virginia English and negro tones. He was slender and tall, slightly vague as to what he wanted of life and the world, happy in himself, a lover of himself and of life. He liked to sit beside Theodosia and talk of his day, uncommitted to it now it was over. He worked somewhere in the town, but his work stood beside him as a commonplace and was never an object to be attained with sweat and thought. He loved himself anew in the warmth of her presence, that she knew.

He would sit idly in his chair, faintly smiling, happy over anything she remembered to tell of her day, and happy over his own memories and vague comments. He made light matters of all the heavy affairs of business, of family, of care of any sort. He wore the cleanliness and freshness of his linens as if he imparted these qualities to them, as if he yielded these qualities with his easy, careless gestures and uncommitted mood. Gone from her, he kept always in Theodosia's mind as that which lent grace to any morning into which it might come, into any evening, any memory, so that she smiled faintly if she thought of him. She knew his delicacy in some harsh way, in some hard framework of knowing that lay over her momentary joys in his radiance, in his beauty. Once, into the midst of the intoxicating vapor which surrounded her sense of him, her own voice spoke aloud, surprising her with its casual finality:

"He'd follow after the last lovely face offered"—and added: "The trick around the eyes and he'd go."

If he were coming she would wear the pale yellow dress he admired and arrange her hair in the way he most praised, a low knot drawn above her neck and pushed securely into the curves at the back of her skull. Knowing that he would come she would linger over the hair, a thought of him and of his gracious, easily given admiration in every lift of the comb as she gently tooled the mass into shape and smiled now

and again at her long face with its firm thin red lips. She had read from her grandfather's books and Frank had brought her books containing the new learning. Conway's knowledge was more powerful with her, she knew, and she smiled at her curving smile until her own lips told her their subtle learning, over and over, retelling. Conway would seat her in the chair of the blue brocade and he would adjust the light to fall in a cascade on the yellow gown, or he would arrange the bowl of roses with some reference to herself and himself and then sit negligently in his chair, himself a part of some whole which he at the same instant encompassed, having no notion of why he did these things. Or did he have no notion? she argued. His knowledge would spread through the room, through the house, gathered to the brilliant constellations that swam in a sun-shaft of light before a window, the motes of the beam, and gathered again to the scent of the honeysuckle outside on the chimney.

ALBERT would come heavily into the parlor although his feet were agile and his large frame was light to his motions. He filled the parlor with his seriousness and with his ponderous future which circled about his agricultural studies. He would lay his pretexts out, this way and that, making his decisions in her presence, but if Conway were at hand he was more light

and less committed, as if only Theodosia had his confidences, as if his approach to Conway were still by the way of the college they had attended, of the streets they now walked together, of the ball they sometimes tossed back and forth, the dogs they owned in common. His strong body, rich with blood and bulk, seemed about to burst from its clothing as he sat opposite the light, moving from time to time in his seat in an excess of vitality. If he bent over a printed page, his earnest eyes lowered to their drooping, his mouth caught in its relaxed, searching pose, his studious moment would give him back to his boyhood, even to childhood, and Theodosia would smile faintly beside her eyes, deeply under the flesh, in a moment of tenderness. Sometimes she would play for him the light music he desired, bent rhythms that paused over brinks and leaped with spasmodic passion to its fulfilment in another twisted measure, any sort so that it moved swiftly to its consummation and readily fulfilled its promises. She was contemptuous of his taste in melodies even when she wanted most to please him. He was a part of the rich insufficiency that surrounded her. "He looks just like Tramp," she said one day as she mounted the stairway, and Tramp was a great mongrel, part Dane, part collie, that lived somewhere on the street.

"He looks exactly like Tramp," she said. She was dressing for his coming, working her hair into the shapes Conway liked, her lips withdrawing from the

tunes Albert wanted played. "Oh, Lord! his *Leave Home Rags* and his *My Mandy Lanes*," she said. Later she would play them for him, plucking the strings quaintly and withdrawing them from their meanings.

When he had first come back from his agricultural college he had talked of a girl named Judith. He still wrote to her, but seldom spoke of her now. He would settle into his chair with a great sigh of content, turning the letter addressed to Judith over and over in his hands, a letter he had forgotten to mail. When he talked of himself he came immediately to the subject that most concerned the farmers, the success of the tobacco pool. Sometimes he seemed cautious as he handled some letter from Judith, turning it about, as if he clung to it. He would beg Theodosia to play the new song he had brought, for he had come then to have her play a song.

"Gosh, you're the only girl in town can play," he said. "Fiddle or piano, it's all one to her. And works either single or double."

"Lady broke. Bridle wise. A right good five-gaited saddle mare," she said. She would withdraw behind the neglected thumping of the piano or the plucked strings, indifferent to the tune but willing enough to accommodate a caller. When she had embarrassed him she would laugh a low laughter and let her eyes close over the music as she trailed it off into some theme she liked.

"Lady broke. . . . I didn't call you that," he said heavily. "I didn't say it."

IN autumn it was reported that a musician was coming to Lester, a larger town ten miles away, to teach violin-playing there. Word was spread about that she would visit Anneville one morning each week if three students could be found for her there. Theodosia and two half-grown children made up the number, and the teacher came. She was a small dark woman, slight in form, quick in her ways, heavy-browed, ambitious to become a great teacher. Old Anthony Bell engaged her to come to his house, had sent for her as soon as he had heard of her presence in the town, and had talked with her in the parlor, grown coherent, alert under the stimulation of the young woman. She made him remember his *Heart Bowed Downs* and his *Trovatores*.

Theodosia felt abashed before the superior skill and she drew her bow nervously over the strings at the test lesson. She was stifled into a few days of inactivity until the new gestures set within her. She must learn to hold the violin. To approach it with the bow. To observe the right angle. To listen to the tone and learn the acoustics of the instrument. Sometimes the dark woman would answer a question by playing a phrase, a skurry of phrases, and Theodosia was half

afraid of these replies, knowing that she missed a part. Not virtuosity but good playing. The words sang in her mind and broke a new world into a firmament, a world fuller than the old. Theory, harmony, musical history, musical literature, technique, the legato, the perfect legato, the singing violin tone. The ragged chrysanthemums bloomed along the front of the house where the south sun shone, and the fallen leaves made every footstep clatter. The fields beyond the town, where they arose on the hills and were seen from the windows of the house, had lost their rough lines as they were turned under by the plow for the winter grains, were set in order for the next growing year. Her eyes, lifted from the strings, would rest far away on the hill field where the earth had been made new and where it ran perpetually now with her singing legato, the brown earth laid out brown in the autumn sun.

The music teacher came each week, her talk a bright flash from the world far outside. She talked in half with her music and with her quick hands, but her speech was crisp and clear. In her the master walked out upon the concert stage and worked his bow over the strings; she gathered intensely in her darkness and in the vibrant speed of her facile hands, her mouth easily turning, her strong slender limbs swaying, or she tapped the bow against her skirt as she told how the master played a movement. Her fingers were little brains secreting the music of thought. Around her a peculiar,

scintillating half-brilliance spread like a fog of things half-known, half-sensed; it caught at the imagination and kindled it but gave it insufficient fuel. The man and the instrument were one. An interpretation of life. Of mind, mood, thought, by the way of sound. Man is speaking here. His voice. Sound brought to high refinements, nuances, exquisite variations to make a speech for the spirit of man. The musician knew; she flashed out of her darkness. These were days of unsatisfied knowing. One could never have enough.

Or again, how a ship cuts the waves open and spreads them apart to roll up on her sides and follow after her in a long sweep of tilting water with a froth of foam melting on its crest, how the little tugs draw a ship across a harbor, four little tugs or three joined to a ship by a long cable that stretches tight, pulling the great lazy giant down a bay. Or the Goddess of Liberty, how she is green like beryl or like deep sea water, her bronze burnt with salt fog until it is brilliantly green, catching the light of the morning on the front of her body and turning it off in bright yellow planes, her great squat figure too round and ample for grace, squarely set on firm skirts, short-thighed, great-waisted, holding her plump torch, a great progeny, a myriad brood mothered under her plump skirts. She is brightly green in the morning sun with planes of yellow light; she is looking down the bay and across the Narrows and out to the sea.

These were inaccessible but not far, making a rela-

tion somehow with the lightness of autumn, the mild sting of the coming cold that could be felt in the early morning. Walking about the town Theodosia wore a bright new coat of rich dark colors and a small velvet hat with a bronze buckle. Conway had helped her to choose the hat, and his lightly spoken approval, gaily negligent, rested upon it all through the autumn and seasoned her whole being with a delicate warmth. A fire burned now in the parlor grate. At nightfall Siver, the black houseboy, was sent through the rooms to renew the coal and brush the hearths clean. Old Tony Bell sat nodding in the room across from the parlor, his room, where the bookshelves were seldom assailed and the books sank together into a solid warped mass. "She will learn to play great music," he said, "a concerto. I heard it in Paris, the Brahms Concerto. It was, I recollect, a night in December. Let her learn, it won't hurt her. I never thought my own flesh and blood would master it. She'll learn." His bed stood against the wall that was farthest from the fireplace. He would sink often into the bed with unwanted satisfaction and fall asleep without consent, or he would arouse himself and take a brisk walk at twilight, stepping along the boards of the gallery.

Theodosia practised scales in single tones and thirds, working happily, blending them in her thought with the running autumn and the crisp frost, with the rich new color that had come to her garments in the coat and hat, in certain gowns she devised with her dress-

maker, in her autumn stockings and a brilliant scarf. Jane Moore came sometimes to practise with the instruments, inaccurate as before but pretty in her gray fur and bright blue dress. She would laugh at the precision of the music teacher and clatter amiably on the piano, her eyes misty with her own prettiness and tender with the devotion of youth to youth. "You're too sweet for words," she would say to Theodosia as she touched the keys lightly, smiling over her shoulder. Her brown hair was softly rolled and centered into low knots. She would tinkle lightly at Albert's songs, giving them a manner, *Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland* dribbling from her pert fingers.

Catherine Lovell had a bright red hat for the mid-winter, accented with an unsubdued cock's feather that tilted and swayed as she walked, as she sat lightly moving in her chair. She went to the Seminary every day to teach, but in the evening she would run to Theodosia for a chat or a walk, or she would bring a gift of winter flowers from her mother's small window garden.

Back would come the day for the fiddle lesson. The teacher would enter with a quick smile, tossing aside her coat and her hat. The piano note would cry out briefly under her quick hand and the gut string would follow, slipping and crawling into tune, Theodosia's heart beating fast with some cruel, fearful pleasure. A skurry of runs and a trill and a few bars from the cadenza of some concerto. The example would clarify

her words: each note must stand out like a star in a dark night. . . . Smoothness in the change of position when the string must be crossed without sound. . . . The singing tone, the perfect legato. . . . The bow should be thought of as of indefinite length—no end to it, no break between the up-bow and the down-bow. . . . “But do not, for all this, be a slave to your fingers. The music must come out of your soul, out of your soul.”

THEODOSIA would wake from the deep first sleep of the night and see the rectangles of the high windows turn to pale silver with the winter dawn. She would move in her bed, opening her eyes briefly upon the familiar furniture of the room, the long glass between the windows, the high dresser, the deep sofa beside the fireplace. Then she would settle to the lighter sleep of the morning, hearing the steps of early passers on the pavement of the street and hearing the click of the gate latch when Siver came to his work. The warmth of the bed would shut about her in a matutinal caress as she sank into light half-slumber, as her mind fared here and yon in speculations and dreams, in plans and visions. The joy of friends would give her a pleasant sense of well-being, and her own warmed youthful blood would drowse and drown in its own relaxed

languors. Sometimes she would float between the earth and some void in a half-intoxication of a dream while her ears half-heard the steps on the street or a call—some boy driving his cow to pasture. Her speculating mind would run forward into the plans for the day, so many hours with the music, the fiddle, the harmony, the piano; or it would center briefly about some dress she was designing with the dressmaker or repairing for herself, and over this or through it would glide her floating senses as they drifted in the void supported by strong fingers on which she lay drooping, circled by strong arms. Siver's knock at the door would dimly arouse her and make her know that she had half-dreamed some image, and his step on the floor as he walked toward the fireplace and bent over the grate to arrange the fire would emphasize the light quality of her consciousness. The sound of the falling kindling would be heavy and remote. Between the separate sounds the spaces of quiet would be light with dreaming, with herself drowned in joy and myth, drooping in strong up-reaching fingers, Albert's hands, but over her and above like the light of some final dawn, radiant but self-contained and entire, identical with light negligent laughter, would float some essence, some misty incandescence that merged with Conway and with her happiness.

When he had kindled a large fire of wood and coal, Siver would close the window and pour hot water from a pail into her pitcher on the wash-stand. He was noth-

ing to her, Siver, but serving hands. He was but serving hands, unsensed, unrealized. He was a command given and accomplished. If he became momentarily real he was intently loathed and quickly transferred to serving hands again. The sound of the flowing water and the crockery would be as distinct and as meaningless as the other sounds of the morning, flat against the coming tide of the new day, unreal before her speculations about the dress or the fiddle-practice. Siver gone and the closed door having settled an hour of stillness upon the room, the earth would grow into the volume and substance of dream and lie finished and accomplished, apart and done.

THE farmers were discontented with the tobacco sales. The speculators were busy passing the crop from hand to hand, playing a game to outdo one another. Sometimes a farmer saw his crop selling for twice the sum he had been paid less than a week earlier. "Too many dead-heads function between the grower and the manufacturer," Albert said. The tobacco wagons, piled high, were lined in every open space about the warehouses. A heavy odor of crude tobacco hung in the damp air.

At Catherine Lovell's home there was a large double parlor with a hard smooth floor. Often the rugs were rolled up for dancing, and then two negroes sat in the

hallway making the music, *I Don't Know Why I Feel So Shy*, or *Dixie Dan*, the rhythms brought down from Hill Street. Albert talked about the new association for the growers as he waited between the dances, sitting along the wall of the dining-room on the red divan. The men would have to combine, he said. The market was all in a wreck. There would have to be such a pool as was never formed before, something solid. He spent his days now going about among the farmers, pledging them to the new measure, talking of it to hostile growers. He carried memoranda in his pocket snapped importantly together under a rubber band. The throb of the dance rhythms would wail from the outer hall. Somebody had given the players a smart drink and they set the true rhythms of Hill Street under the dancers' feet, rhythms richly ripened with use. Theodosia and Conway trampled the rhythms under their light tread.

I likes a little loven now and then,
When the loven one is you. . . .

What was a rhythm more or less? their feet asked the smooth floor. "What's this thing we're a-dancen to?" Conway asked her. "Is it a two-step or a waltz or a barn dance, or what is it anyway?"

"Don't you know really, on your honor?"

"I just get up and do what the music makes me. I never know what kind 'tis."

Albert was a great bulk coming in at a door, coming nearer, taking his seat under the dim lamp when he

sat in her parlor. His face was large and firm, sudden in its appraisals, but he was uncertain of her and of himself. She saw his uncertainty of her in his quick scrutiny of her when he spoke. The men would have to pool, he said. He had talked to twenty farmers and growers that day. He was dog tired. Some men were fools, unable to see their own good when it stood less than three inches away. She would turn to the fiddle, making herself remote.

SHE would pluck at his talkative music, making it utter its bland commonplace between flights of well-bowed musical comment, musical scorn. She would wrap each common saying into a sheaf bound lightly with shreds of scintillating clamor.

“Where’d you get that? How’d you know to do all that truck?” he asked.

“Imelda Montford wrote a diary and she left it in an old hamper. ‘I want to lern grek and laten. I will not be a idle fol. I will have what is in boks.’” She traced the words on the wall with her finger. “Roland built a bridge for a deposed king to ride on. William had red hair and owned nine thousand acres of Virginia land. Rufus bought a negro wench and three men from Captain Custer, and made a note of it in the back of a geography book. Thomas Montford bought a horse from Asa Fielding and left a note of that on the fly-

leaf of an old grammar. Anne had a town named in her honor, Anneville. You know the place."

"Anneville. I know. Gosh, yes."

"Theodosia Montford took Luke Bell to husband and then the Bells got into the story."

"Took. God's sake! It's my opinion she got took."

"Gules two lions couchant argent. . . ."

"What you a-comen to?"

"Gules with a fess and six crosslets gold. . . ."

"What's the joke?"

"Bendy of ten pieces, gold and azure. . . ."

"What the 'ell?"

"The language of the Montfords. The speech of old Robert and his peers."

"You're too full of joy. I aim to take some of that joy out of you."

"His glorious pals, you might say."

"Two months from now and I aim to do it."

"Or, go back to Roland, he built a bridge. . . ."

"You need somebody and it's my opinion you need me."

"Rode. Kreutzer. Singer. The *Fingerübungen*. Excellent for muscular development in scale work. Miss Schuester, then. Duos for violin and piano. Duos for two fiddles. Does that answer your first question? If that's not enough . . ."

"Some day I aim to smash that old fiddle plumb into the middle of perdition."

"You'll never get your hands on it."

"In two months from now I aim to get you. Take your time and get ready. And if that old music box gets in my way . . ."

"You'll never get your hands on it." She bent her eyes to the strings where the hair lines of the bow sang over them. He was already a whirlwind under her flying fingertips.

"You get good and ready. When I come I'll come like a roar'en lion."

His strength assailed her, and going about her unsettled routines in the early February cold she rested upon his decision where it suffused her mind. She thought of her grandfather as the chief witness of her achievement with the fiddle; he represented a throng of watchers, there to scrutinize her skill. She held inwardly an intense wish to show him what the fiddle could do in her hands, and as she brought a study to completion and played it with her master she thought of Anthony as the listener, as he was, as he sat over his mellow fire, or she would stop often by his chair and talk with him of the music, retelling all or much of what the teacher had brought her in interpretation.

Or, remembering that the music must come out of the spirit, the soul, she would search inwardly for some token or glimpse of this shadowy substance, this delicate eidolon. The question arose again and again. The soul, where and what was it? She observed that the preachers in the churches had souls for their commerce, and that there one learned that all souls were of

equal value. But in the novel or the poem the lover said, "I love you from the depths of my soul," or the author said, "He was stirred to the depths of his soul," or "He was frightened in his soul." Striving to divide her being, to set bounds upon parts, she would turn a half-whimsical gaze inward as she strove to achieve the singing tone and to bow the indefinite legato. "Does the music come out of me really, out of some inner unit, myself, all mine?" she would question, "or do I simply imitate, skilfully or not, what the teacher does?" She wanted to lay her finger on this integer and say, "This is mine." She wanted to go past the bounding of blood in arteries and the throb of her pride in her grandfather's witnessing of her advancing skill. The tone sang more true and she took a great, impatient joy in it, searching, as she was, more deeply for the answer to the riddle. Or, in the coming of Albert into her senses, her questioning thought would swim in a pool of inattention and semi-consciousness.

TOWARD the end of February Anthony Bell sickened of a cold and kept continually in his room sitting over his fire. The sound of his coughing went through the house, and of his scolding voice as he assailed Siver for, as he named them, his trifling ways. After a week he was no better, and the fact came to Theodosia in her pre-occupation as a vague trouble. A vague sense of im-

pending demands weighted her bow and her pencil. Writing chords all morning at her table a load bore heavily upon her hand, unrecognized or undefined. A dream-like unrest followed her as she passed her grandfather's door or mounted the staircase, as she turned back to her studies after the departure of her friends. She went to his room often between her goings and comings. She would stand beside his fire and offer sympathy or question him. Had he tried this remedy or that? Unprepared for care she met this small demand with a slight vexation, or she set herself to prepare some comfort for him, or some diversion. He would soon be better, she assured him.

But there came a day when he was worse, when he kept his bed, and Theodosia called a physician, Dr. Muir. She went often to his bedside, offering to read, to talk, to prepare foods. Anthony seemed troubled, and as the days went by he continually called for papers from his desk or for letter-files from a cupboard in a back room upstairs. He seemed unable to find some paper although he searched endlessly, or he would fall asleep with the documents scattered over his bed or falling from his lax hands. One day an old friend, a Mr. Reed, from the bank, called and sat with him for an hour. When the visitor had gone Anthony seemed more than ever troubled, searching again for the missing paper, falling asleep.

As Theodosia sat with her father at supper on the evening after the banker's visit she spoke of her grand-

father's worry, opening the subject with Horace in abstracted earnestness. The house was disturbed since her grandfather's illness and she wanted relief.

"I wish you'd stop in to see Grandfather tonight," she said. "He's sick and he seems to have some matter to trouble his mind. I think you'd better talk with him a little. He's worried."

"Tell him I'll take him on a trip next summer to the Virginia Ocean. A ship glides down the water on silken satin sails. Tell him to think about that and he'll drop off right away. Tell him to think of silken satin sails. The silken sad uncertain. Tell him not to think about the silken sad uncertain, but tell him to think of silken satin sails. Nothing is uncertain. All is certain. I'm right."

"I'm worried myself," Theodosia said after a little. "Grandfather is real sick. He needs advice maybe. He's lost heart. He's got some trouble on his mind."

"All is lost save honor and there's damn little of that left, hardly a copper cent's worth. Tell him to set his mind upon the silken satin sails of certainty. Pour me out another cup of coffee, Dosia, and pass me the jam, Siver. It is jam, isn't it? Jam is the staff of life and there's damn little of it left. Damn the jam. Tonight I have to practise again for the play. I take the part of the wicked villain because of my deep stentorian voice. It's for the benefit of the Sabbath School, and you should go and assist a cause if not to see your sire saw the air. I am your sire, ain't I? Theodosia sired by

Horace, he by Anthony the grand old war horse, he out of Theodosia Montford by Luke Bell. I have to practise tonight for the play. It's for the benefit of some charity, I forget what, some measure promoted by the combined Sabbath-school interests of the entire town. It's a big thing. Which of these renderens do you like best? You see the beautiful young lady is in a hazardous position from poverty and what-not. . . .”

“What did my mother die of?” Theodosia asked after the matter of the renderings had been settled.

“Of a meningitis. I was not here at the time. In Lester, I was, attenden court, I recall. I hurried home as soon as I learned of it and asked what was the matter. They said a meningitis. How old are you, Dosia?”

“I'm twenty.”

“To think it! Twenty! Then it's been seven years, eight, how many? Since your mother died? I recollect I heard them say, 'The poor motherless orphan, twelve years old.' Or did they say thirteen? I don't know why I never married again. Eight years a widower, I've been, and not altogether unpresentable to the sex, I've heard it said.”

Theodosia wept softly behind her downcast eyes when she turned her thought to her mother. She remembered her as a large broken woman lying on her couch all day, sometimes playing sonatas on the piano half the night. She had given Theodosia the bedroom above the parlor the spring before she died. She was re-

membered standing at the doorway of the room, ill, directing the houseman to change the furniture this way and that, trying several arrangements.

"Your mother was a lady and a pretty woman to boot," Horace said. "But the family trees all come by your father, and don't you forget that, all the shrubbery. I remember how Mike O'Connor laughed one time when I said, 'Two lions couchant, male and female created he them.' You ought to 'a' heard old Mike O'Connor roar to that. 'But don't you ever let any woman get a hold onto you,' Mike O'Connor says. 'Not a firm hold. She'll make you roll a baby buggy, and what does a man look like a-rolleⁿ a baby buggy? You never saw a Irishman a-rolleⁿ a baby buggy,' Mike says. 'Think back,' Mike says, 'and see if ever you saw a Irishman rollen one of them things. Not a real God-knows Irishman. You never did. And you never will.' "

Horace called for more sugar for his last cup of coffee, and Theodosia searched the sideboard and the pantry. "I'm part Irish," he said. "And I need more sugar." When Siver was called he found a little in an unused sugar dish on a high shelf. Theodosia knew the indifferent economic plan of the house. Either Horace or Anthony paid the bills, as they had money by. It was Anthony who owned the house, his inheritance along with the farm, Linden Hill, which had now passed to other hands. There had been some talk between Anthony and Mr. Reed of a mortgage, and when

Horace went to his rehearsal she looked for the word mortgage in a dictionary to find its meaning.

FROM beyond her playing, as a recitative, Albert and his declarations reached her continually. "I hope you're keepen the count of the weeks," he said. "Six weeks is what you've got to get ready in." Her continual reply, spoken or unspoken, beat and throbbed with the pulse of the music as she advanced her lyric work and won praise from her master, "I want to play the fiddle to the end of the earth. I want to go to the end of music and look over the edge at what's on the other side."

She thought of Albert as strong and good. She knew the beauty of his vigorous body, clean as it was with health. On the hills beyond the town the laborers were burning the plant beds and making ready for the long growing year. From her chamber she saw the smoke arise and "They're burning tobacco beds," she said, her mind running over the fields in a swift going and over the earth as it lay away in shield-like masses that were brown now with the uses of winter. "He makes love like a tomcat," her lips said suddenly once while she paused in her playing to tinker with a bad string. "Albert. He makes love like a tomcat."

The music teacher had her changing moods; in her entrance her mood was stated, in her down-flung coat and her quick bowing; but her presence, whatever it was, would never crush her student's zeal.

"What's that? I want to do that," Theodosia said. "I want to learn to do that. I intend to learn it. Give it to me for an exercise. It can't get away from me. I will have it. I want it."

"You will never do that in this world," she said. "Your hand wasn't made for that. You couldn't do successive octaves, Miss. Don't cry for the moon. Artificial harmonics will always be beyond you. It's no great matter."

They were laughing, speaking idly. "I want it. I want that passage inside my skin. It'll liberate my soul. I must have a showy, idle, ornamental soul, full of ruffles and grill-work. I want that very passage. Oh, God, how I want it."

She did not believe what the teacher said of her hand. Eventually she would grow to that playing, she thought, and she would surprise her master. "I will go to the end of everything, I'll look over the edge of the last precipice of music," she said inwardly. "I'll look over the last precipice of music and say, 'God!' I'll say 'Where are you?' I'll climb all the musical stairs there are."

ANTHONY lingered in a state of half-illness, in and out of his bed. One day his distress for some missing paper seemed acute and she offered him her help. He was unwilling to share with her. "Your business is the

violin now," he said, sinking weakly into his chair by the fire, but in a moment after he was sickened with faintness and she helped him back to the bed.

Two days later Theodosia found that she had determined to search among the papers in the back upper room to try to find the truth about their house, that she would take upon herself the necessity which awaited her as her grandfather visibly failed. Siver had spoken to her of his wages, which, he said, had not been paid for five weeks. He must have his money, he said, speaking respectfully, embarrassed, for he needed clothing. He must have his pay or he would have to find another place. Theodosia paid him the money from a small sum which she had, and during that same evening she took a mass of papers and letters from the old desk and carried them to her room to examine them before the fire. Many of the letters had been tied into bundles and these she examined first because they offered a modicum of order in the chaos of the mass. Among them were letters of affection which ran through a long gamut of admiration and passion to apathy, letters which had passed between her father and mother.

She sat all the following day over the papers. The memoranda yielded a confusion of dates and moneys spent or collected, a going and coming of funds, lands, expenses. Nothing seemed to have marketable value. No memoranda indicated a note or mortgage held in fee. The farmland had been sold; there were records of

sums paid for this tract or that. The musty papers told musty stories, already half-known to her, of acres inherited, of sale bills of watered farmlands and uncut forests lying along the banks of some stream, described with poles and links and the jargon of surveys. In the documents a surveyor walked around a stretch of land, in the sun of warm days, in the wind or the cold or the frost of ill seasons. He walked around tracts with his compass and chain, measuring, writing figures, drawing maps, making descriptions. Five people heired a five-part property, divided equally by the survey, a farm to Joseph, a farm to Eliza, a farm to Jacob, a farm to Anthony T., a farm to Theodosia, the wife of Thomas Singleton. . . . A will had been opened and read in a parlor, the heirs sitting formally in their seats as became the inheritors of land. Later they drew their chairs together in groups to confer. One sat apart dissatisfied. The truth of the letters met the truth of the surveys and the memoranda. It had been a rainy day. The inheritors had reached the place with difficulty, some of them wet to discomfort. The parlor had been dark and ill dusted, murky with age and memorials. A young woman had brought cedar wood for the fireplace.

They had met again when the survey had been made, sitting again in the light that fell through the old curtains, and their discontents had now been adjusted or hidden. The surveyor had made a plat for each one, a shield of irregular shape drawn on paper, representing

lands, arable acres and woodlands. The plows of the spring would slip through the fields and the inheritors would be about their business, belonging now, each one, to his land. But the substance of the myth would fade out from under them. Some of them were dead, and from some the land had melted away. Owners were separated from their ownership. Memoranda of deeds began to tell their tales, items of barter. "Beginning at a stone at the east edge of the Quincy pike, corner to lot 4, thence with edge of said pike south 88½ west 32 poles 23 links, thence south. . . . Said farm known as Linden Hill. . . ." It was accurately described, line for line. In the house someone was born, the birth told in a letter from Charlotte, the mother, to Anthony. Another paper, notes drawn up for the writing of some deed, "witnesseth that said Anthony, for and in consideration of the sum of nineteen thousand dollars to him paid by said Goodwin . . . hath given, granted, bargained, sold, transferred, and released, and by these presents does give, grant, bargain, sell, transfer, and release unto said Goodwin, a certain tract of land situated, lying, and being in the county aforesaid on the south side of the Casey Run and bounded as follows: Beginning at a stone . . . thence with edge of said pike south 88½ west 32 poles 23 links . . . said farm known as Linden Hill."

The road ran between the farms, mapped and charted, and the farms were charted and recorded, described and owned, bounded by fences and walls and

watercourses, these men belonging to the land as owners of land. But the land was gone, cut from under their feet, in consideration of the sum of nineteen thousand dollars, it was released, bargained, granted, given, sold, transferred. The day of the sale had been a bright day in June. The tillers of the soil had already planted the tobacco and the corn in the arable fields. The child born had been herself. A letter told of the humid noon, dinner on long tables before the house door, the half of a mutton roasted by three negroes over a great wood fire, piles of bread, drink for the men in the barn, whisky poured into little glasses. She had been a baby above-stairs in a cradle. It was all now a mouldy smell on rotting paper, a faint stench and a choking dust. An imperfect chronicle arose out of the stench and this chronicle built the present into a new structure. She sat staring at the embers or she turned again to the documents, for they had hints of more to disclose.

It was on this day that she first helped her grandfather to the commode, that she had known the look of his feeble withered body, had glimpsed at it as she had folded his blanket about his shaking knees. She went away to walk in the twilight of the day, spinning rapidly along the street, meeting Frank and walking with him to the end of the town, merry with him over some joke that he had. Later Albert was sitting under her soft light.

"Take your time, no hurry," he said, half whisper-

ing as he stood by the door at his departure. "Take your time."

The papers scattered over her sofa in the room above had begun to reveal a hard story, hard to know and realize. She turned a bitter, unsmiling face from him as he stood by the door and glanced at her bent lips in the glass.

"I'll not hurry. Don't bother yourself."

"But in the end you'll come."

"Like a millstone, I will. Like a mountain."

"Mountain is no matter. I'll get you. You'll be glad to be got. . . . I'll show you what a man can do. When I set-to I'm a real lover."

She wanted his face between her hands at that moment, but she would not trust her tenderness. She remembered her grandfather's withered body, his shrunken maleness, and she was broken by pity. She made her pity resemble scorn as she turned apart and laid the fiddlestick carefully in the case beside the fiddle. The evening was over.

"When I come I'll be a real lover. The kind you'll want. I know you."

"Slam the door after you when you go, so it'll lock. Please do. Just slam it hard."

"Two months I gave you. Time flies. It's half gone already. Goen fast."

"Just slam it hard. Save me a trip out to the door."

SHE had brought other papers from the cupboard in the back room, and she sat busy with these all of a day and half a night. She was weary now of the stale odors of decayed paper and dust, weary of the truth which was now established. Her father was father also to three mulattoes. Letters from her mother's relatives touched the matter as if it were beyond dispute, reiterated it as if it were a knowledge well premised and antedating the discussions of funds and settlements. She laid all the letters relating to this subject in a pile together and studied them in order. They were letters from her mother's father, now dead.

Her hands on the fiddle were weak and apathetic, startled into numbness. She put the instrument aside, shut it tenderly away into its case and sat staring at the flames or she moved suddenly to some new posture. She felt as if she were alone with her grandfather in this; Conway had been shut away as tenderly as had been the fiddle; Albert was avoided as pertaining somehow too nearly to the facts. She read the letters again, eating their words, leaping ahead to the telling phrases. "This is the last of your share from your mother's estate. Make it go as far as it will. You knew when you married Horace Bell that he was the father of two blacks. . . . I will come whenever I can, or your brother will manage to go by Anneville on his way back from the meet. . . . You better turn your attention to something else. Take up church work. . . . Dropped his litter in the alley behind the jail. The half-

wit, Dolly Brown, for God's sake! Old Josie's girl was a handsome wench, but slobbering Dolly Brown. . . . A strange taste in wenches."

She gathered the letters together and dropped them into the fire in a fury of anger, but when they had turned to feathery cinders she wondered at her act and repented of it. Persons had grown out of the search, a man vaguely outlined in youth, Anthony Bell, or her mother, Charlotte, others. Her infantile concept of her father as one playful, merry, light-hearted, child-like, made a confused war with later concepts of him as a jumble of demands upon affection and forbearance. She remembered her mother as a large passionate woman who hated her broken life, but in turn she remembered little Annie, born after the incident behind the jail, five years after. She was benumbed before the new knowledge and shared only with Anthony.

Her outer vision dulled by the fire and by weariness, her inner vision heightened, and she began to divide her being, searching for some soul or spirit. Her search took her into her grandfather's being where it touched accurately to her own. He was old, withered, palsied, but he had life, a life, from first to last, she observed, and the house was real for him and the people of the house, the pain of his sickness. Her search took her into many of the ways of men. When a man is a baby someone uncovers his nakedness and bathes it. Then he has a long season of being obscure, withdrawn

within himself, alive, secret with life. Finally he is old and again someone must uncover his nakedness and bathe him, handle him as if he were new-born. She herself had done this for him. Where, she questioned, is his soul?

She brought forward her knowledge of the old man's life, trying to make it stand as a picture before her. As a young man he had taught for a time in some college. His journals had come from far cities and he would read all night. He had been richly alive then, sensitive, secret with life, his nakedness covered, his bow gallant, his compliments ready. He had been a gay story-teller, and his friends had loved him. They had come miles to visit him, to sit all night over the fire. Then he had married Alice, a strange woman who liked to sit apart.

When all the subtractions were made the naked man was left, new-born, uncovered. There should be a soul there somewhere, she thought, and she searched into the withered leavings of crippled body and quavering voice. When she had found this entity in her grandfather she would, she thought, be able to identify it within herself. Her emotion for him pooled largely within her and brought her to tears, and she gazed down into the red coals of her fire with a blurred vision. Gratitude and anxiety mingled in her weeping, and when she thought of the burnt letters her tears were renewed. Then she drew a blanket about her shoulders and went softly down the stairs to her grand-

father's door and listened to his noisy breathing with a sob of thankfulness that he still lived. She went within and passed beyond the glow of the night-light Siver had placed on the table near the bed. There was a mouldy smell of age putrefaction, close air, burning oil from the lamp. The fire had been covered with ashes, but it smouldered and gave a jerky flame. The air near the bed was heavy with the sour odor. The man lay stretched at length, sinking flatly into the bed, scarcely raising the quilts from their level. He had spread a silk handkerchief over his forehead to protect it from the cold, and she saw with a moment of shame that the handkerchief was streaked with stains where he had worn it about his throat. A week before she had bathed his face and shoulders, somewhat loathingly, but three days later she had bathed his entire body. She had grown in the interval. The days since had towered above her and she had reached to accompany each one to its highest pinnacle.

She loathed nothing that he might reveal and she looked at him searchingly. She remembered that his knowledge was gone or blurred; he could no longer lay his hand upon it; it was gone then; his charm was gone. What, she questioned, did his spirit have to do with his knowledge, with his person, his courage, his putrefying flesh, his taste, his temper, his determination, his belief in herself? He wanted to be alive, secret, shut within himself. She tried to eliminate from herself all but that which they held in common and, the

cancellations made, to identify something which one could describe as deathless, as indicative of a man. Her tenderness intervened, however, and she found that she had resolved to make him some light flannel caps to protect his head from the cold while he slept. She felt a holy sense of comfort when she went softly from his door. In the hall Horace was taking off his overcoat. He had just come in.

"You're up late, Dosia," he said. "You let your fellows stay till after midnight. It's not prudent. Trust a Bell."

He opened the parlor door and looked in at the dark and the fireless hearth. She had gone to the foot of the staircase.

"Grandfather," she said. "I was in his room." She was indifferent to his words.

"Come on," he said, "we'll go upstairs together, hand in hand, our hearts entwined. 'She's a pretty girl now,' I said the other day, said it to myself, you understand, and it wasn't a lie I told either. No need to worry about the old man. He's better. I'll lay a bet he'll be out again in a week. The old war horse, he's not so easy beaten. He'll come under the wire first, the old horse will. It's been a long time since I walked upstairs with as pretty a lady."

At the top of the flight, where his way led him down the hall to his room at the back of the house, he caught her into his arms.

"Kiss your father good-night," he said.

"I don't want to." He had not made such a demand for years.

"I want to kiss a pretty girl before I go to bed and by God you're a pretty one. Kiss me good-night."

"I don't want to," she was saying. He had already kissed her many times and was trying to force her to return the expression. She pulled herself from his arms and went quickly to her room, hearing his step recede down the hallway. She locked her door and turned to the cluttered room, which she set in order. She prepared for bed quickly, for the room was cold. She felt liberated, inwardly cool, free to love and hate. Between her grandfather and herself there was some relation, she resolved. There was some beauty in his putrefaction, some flower in his decay. She was freed to hate Horace Bell. His touch on her arms and on her breast had been obscene. Somewhere there was a soul within her, within her grandfather likewise, she thought. She had identified it with a swift moment of concentrated loathing, cut it free with hate. Now there would be to describe it, to outline it, to study it, to see it. The music must come out of it. She lay in her bed, hard with determination and cool with the end of emotion.

In the day that followed she gave herself to her work without interruption. The teacher had set a difficult task and the time for the lesson was near at hand. She took a respite in the difficulties that lay before her fingers.

SHE saw that Anthony was better now, his voice stronger in speech, his will stronger. "Siver, send that barber fellow up here. I must be trimmed," he had called out. He sat beside the fire with a book which he thought that he read. She would not think in detail of the facts disclosed to her by the letters, holding her mind steadily apart from that knowledge. No one but the music teacher reached her inner immunity. Their duos for violin and piano, for two violins, became two remote minds conversing as abstraction was laid over against abstraction, theme against theme, and once, for experiment, key against key.

She stood beside Anthony's chair to talk of the music, to tell him the names of the masters whose works she played. She would play a Concerto, he asserted, his heart set to it. "They'll hear you in the capitals," he said. He was able to care for his body now; he had reached for his manhood, but she could not go back to her former place. "The Brahms Concerto, you'll play it. That's what I want. I heard it in Paris. It was the second time I went there." Standing thus beside him her identifying mind went swiftly to the matter on which she would not dwell, sped over it, naming it with a wordless withdrawal. "It may take four years, six maybe, study and practice, but that's my wish. You'll play the Concerto. You'll go to the metropolis to study." She kissed his cheek, her naming mind on the matter that gave her pain and fear. Then, faltering, she told him of what she had learned from

the papers. He burst into a torrent of anger, oaths choking back his words.

“Never let me hear you mention it. Not whilst I live. The worst piece of impudence that ever I saw in life. Enough virtue in a Bell, in a Montford, to carry along a little excess weight. Never let me hear a sign of this again. Get about your business.”

Hard words, cracked with age and anger, spent strength, and he trembled in his chair. Tone left his words high as jagged missiles thrust upon the air of the room. She was weeping now.

“Get about your business. Get on. Get outen here. Away.”

SHE was playing scales all morning in her room, using difficult intervals, her content running now with the cry of the tone and settling to the grace of her fingers as they crumpled over the strings. Her hands were pliant but narrow, not good fiddle hands, the teacher had said. They were her mother’s hands much diminished. She was hearing the words of the teacher, her master, as they discoursed of vibration. She was, the teacher, herself an epitome of the fiddle, her quick graceful standing figure, her hand that was broad and flexible in the palm. She wondered if anything else touched this woman. The inner psychic vibration which should be reflected in the rapid vibrations of the fin-

gers on the strings, such as this was her meat and drink. The greater master had played a Chopin Nocturne for one "eating the bitter bread of exile."

"It should be easy, though, to make a dethroned king weep," she said.

She let her fingers have their joy in their skill knowing that an ironic undertow had set upon her thought. Enough virtue in a Bell to carry along any quantity of excess weight, Anthony had said to her, his anger in a flame. The two daughters of black Josie's girl, Deb, were grown women now. She remembered them as cooks or nurses or laundresses. They were named Americy and Lethe, and now she remembered vividly one warm September day when she had stopped Lethe on the street and asked her to do some laundry work. The reply had been a faintly smiling refusal, some evil in it. She recalled now her tone of mind and her bodily attitude as she had worked the end of her parasol between the bricks of the pavement, a gesture to accompany the slightly forward pose of her head, her manner condescending, amused, expectant. "Could I get you to do some fine laundry work for me, Lethe?"

Now she labored with the more difficult scales, grown weary of them as she thought of the September day, her parasol daintily plucking at the bricks, her assurance and expectancy, and then the strange, brief, but not curt refusal, "No'm, you couldn't." A smile she could not understand, some evil in it, had dented the brown girl's face, had dented her brown cheeks and slightly

lifted her lips. Her words had been slowly spoken and her gaze had fixed itself upon the parasol for an instant while the decision was being made, but had traveled then over the blue silk crêpe dress to Theodosia's face. She remembered the evil of the smile and the slowly spoken refusal, and how they had lain over her evening, had weighted her day as with a rebuff and had brought a distress to her members that had mounted to a deep fatigue.

"My sisters," she said, rubbing the rosin over the hair threads of the bow. A distinct fear stood in her breast for the moment. She opened the window wide.

She thought minutely of Americy and Lethy—or Lethe. She wondered which of the names she should think when she thought of the brown girl, and she guessed the origin of the name. "Call it Aphrodite, Aurora, Lethe, call it Lethe, Lethy," she heard a voice say. Now she thought intently of the two dark women and tried to picture them. They were older than herself. Americy had strange marks like freckles on her face, splotches of deeper brown. There had been some story of her which she could not now distinctly remember. It had something to do with her having been in the jail for stealing or for drunkenness. She found that her penetrating memory yielded her more of Lethe than of Americy, for she could recall Lethe's face more sharply. Her picture of Lethe's face was more clear than the detailed story of Americy although she now remembered that it was for drunken brawling that

Americy had been incarcerated. The incident belonged a year or two back in time. Americy had been making loud obscene talk on the street, in a brawl with some man, and she had been taken to the lockup. There was something more of it, she remembered, cocaine or whisky. She had pled guilty and had somehow raised the money for the fine when she was tried in the court two days later.

"All right, then, my sisters," she said. A great weariness assailed her and she was aware of fear. There was more to comprehend and the exercises grew irksome, difficult.

Her thought passed beyond fear and rested on pity, abhorrence, sickening loathing. Stiggins, then—she turned no longer from the thought of Stiggins. His mother was the half-wit who lived in the alley behind the jail. She had lived there many years, for the cabin there had been left to her by some white woman. There had once been some litigation over the property; it had been wanted by the county for some purpose and there had been a suit in the court, all the lawyers taking sides, half-jocularly at first. In the end the cabin had not been sold, for Dolly Brown had been adjudged incompetent and her property had been secured from sale or condemnation. The affair had been threshed through several courts and all the lawyers had enlisted, renewing old bitternesses over it. The people of the town had gone to hear the speeches of the lawyers. "They're a-tryen Dolly Brown's cabin," Conway had said.

All the town had gone to the court as if it were a show to see, and the lawyers had spoken in turn—eloquence, bitterness, laughter. Horace Bell had been on the side of the half-wit and he had made a long speech in defense of her rights as one of the innocents of the earth, rhetoric flowing richly. People had gone in groups to look at the cabin behind the jail and Dolly Brown had met them with smiles and giggling laughter until these visits had wearied her. Then she had thrown boiling water at groups to drive them off. Theodosia could not remember when Stiggins had not stayed in the livery stable and she had always thought of him as being somehow related to the horses and mules there. She had seen his hand on a mule's throat to slip the harness over the stubby hair, a yellow hand moving knowingly over the mule's flesh. He was still as a boy of ten in mind although she knew that he was but a few months younger than herself. He had grown up in the livery stable, sleeping on the straw in the loft, and nobody regarded him as more than a semi-idiot. Ladies never went beyond the door of the stable, but she herself had been far inside once when she was a child. Romping along beside her uncle, the horse dealer, on the way to the candy store, she had gone with him into the half-dark of the stable when he had stopped there to look at a horse. She remembered water dripping from a rotting trough, a hand pump where some workmen bent and lifted to the lilt of an iron handle, the closed stall where the show horse was

kept. The earth floor was beaten hard by the feet of the horses, and the stalls went, one after another, far back into a brown darkness. Men came there to relieve themselves in the stalls, and there was a foul odor all about.

Stiggins, a link between what men keep and what they throw away, summarized her thought. He breathed the air of the discarded, the foul; he slept in it. She put the scales aside, for their mounting tones no longer reached toward some infinite adjustment, some perpetual promise. Stiggins was her brother. The scales were a weariness.

Albert too was a weariness, set far back and left when she had gone into the region about the yellow half-wit, Stiggins. She refused to ride with him when he asked her to go. He had stood at the house door gravely pleading that the day was warm and bright. His strong limbs offered her ease as he stood there before the bright warmth of the sun. Distracted, she waited beside her grandfather's door, listening to his argument, but she gave a negative reply. Standing there, she wanted suddenly to go into his breast and rest. Her eyes clung a moment to his large clean bosom where a single intention dwelt, clung to his strong hands. She went back into Anthony's room shaking her head, closing the door after her.

CATHERINE LOVELL was going away to live in another

town and her going began to leave a mark upon the days of the season even before it was consummated at a point upon some exact day. Her going spread through the week that preceded it and gave it a heightened reality, touching it with a not altogether unpleasant sense of disaster. For the last time the rugs were rolled back in the Lovell parlors and the musicians sat in the outer hall. Knowing it to be the last, the dancers were tender and gay, bending toward the departure with heightened beings. Theodosia was more intensely aware of Catherine in her leaving, her affection for her running in a full tide that ran counter to her recent unrest and swept this into its own channel. There was abundant virtue in a Bell then, and with Conway she walked lightly on the rhythms of Hill Street, adoring him in the moment of Catherine's going. She worked all morning over the fiddle or the harmony, Catherine's departure giving her faculties intense acumen so that the chords dripped from her pencil-tip and spread over the sheets of lined paper and her lips hummed phrases that played over the chords and departed from them in airy flights of inconsequential song, never returning. Ruth Robinson had brought her a gift of spring blossoms and Jane Moore had come to talk of how much Catherine would be missed. Intensities of affection welled all around her. Albert in the dance, settling his fingers to steady her in the step, had whispered again, "Two weeks now I give you. I'll close in against next week is done." They were a warmth of life touching her life

minutely. They excluded fear with the warm touch of their nearness.

After a day in the house she went to walk at night-fall, in the dusk of the last twilight hour. People were assembled about the reading-lamps of the firesides, for the shades were not yet drawn and she could see into the houses. Little children were running before the firelight, their heads just reaching above the low window sills. It had been county court day and the town had been filled with busy people and the clatter of pleasant noises. Albert had been everywhere about, talking with the growers, and he had made a speech from the court-house steps. Forty per cent of the farmers had already been pledged to the measure, he had told her, and he would count eighty per cent an assured success, his eyes forgetful of her when he made the declaration, his eyes resting upon her without seeing. "You would eat his percents from his hand," now she said.

Footsteps came from the deeply shadowed pavement before her, going steps, receding quickly. The drama of the darkening town was but lightly held together, as if she could break it with a laugh. She walked briskly through an upper street thinking of her friends and of Catherine's going. She had from each, she reflected, what each held out to her, and her music counted richly for something. A long strange gloom was settling over the rolling hills beyond the town where the fields and the pastures lay, a gloom lit with

the strange light from a low-bent horizon, vividly burnt to orange and black-red. The town was the dark core around which the fields centered. Albert was whispering his wish and his intention, growing daily more sure and more restless. All day the town had been the leaping, out-crying center of the farmed acres, the traders shouting their musical incantations over the mounting prices of cattle and mules, and Albert had summarized many goods as he had stood before her to make his speech from the court-house, had set a hilltop upon the day and upon the plowed fields. "In less than two weeks," he had said the night before, and the week was well begun. "The kind of lover you'll want."

All about, up and down the street, were remote sounds of retreating steps, coming steps, voices that cried out in low commands or questions, but they said nothing for her beyond the abundant drama of their passing. She moved in a richness and fullness of sensation, cloaked in sense, or the pleasure of setting her feet forward swiftly drowned all thought in momentary pools of physical being. Or, standing at the gate after the walk, having heard the click of the gate latch which always meant the end of a journey, the peculiar sound of the gate when it was closed from within the garden, a deep metal click, alto, unlike that of any other gate she knew, a token of possible finalities came into her thought and her bodily presence. Albert gathered the fields together and centered them, but in turn he centered himself into her body. The parallels of the

street converged far down in the west at the line the set sun made with the hills. The cool of the night touched her face and a shiver passed over her body, less of cold than of emotion deeply established as she recognized some unity within herself which related to her friends, to Albert's wish, to Conway's gentleness and beauty, and a clear thought of Conway brought a smile to her lips.

"This is my spirit, my soul. It's here," she said. "This unit. I can almost touch it with my words." Dark had come now. The lights of the town were burning in order, one after the other up the street. She passed up the steps of the gallery slowly.

THREE

CATHERINE LOVELL's face was dim in Theodosia's memory now that it was gone from the town. To her this was something to contemplate, this sure loss of a face when it had passed beyond the sight of the eye. The face would be recognized instantly anywhere upon the earth, in any crowd, but it could not be restored to a vivid image in waking thought. Theodosia pursued all vanishing faces with moments of wonder and amazement, for Jane Moore, out of sight, was but dimly seen although the flavor of her being, of her way, her smile, was keenly discerned. The same was true of Ruth although she came often to the parlor, and true of Conway, of Albert, of Frank, and she played a game of trying to hold the image minute by minute after the face had disappeared through a doorway, but only a dim vision together with an estimate or a general essence could be assured, although Albert's look with its momentary pleading and rough assurance somehow entered her frame and consorted with some part of her own being, richly remembered in the joyous consenting of her members, but accompanying this ran always a tender thought of Conway and his beauty, who, if he were but vaguely visualized, was real and

one with Albert in whatever favor her mind yielded of contemplation and tenderness.

Perhaps, she reflected, these faces were the less vividly imaged because they were deeply known in other than visual reports. All the familiar faces of the town were so richly seasoned with all the rest that went with them in the making of a person that they were in themselves dimmed. Old faces, as these were, in youth or age, inherited of others, the Bell face, the Robinson face, the Moores, the Brookes, the Tanners, the Mac-Dougals—one would know where they had derived. Bell faces had been greeting Robinson faces on the street of the town for more than a hundred and twenty-five years. Or, the face of the music teacher, out of sight, shadowed into her darkness of hair and brow and became less flesh under the remembered capricious flights of her fiddle singing. Albert, gone from the town now on an extended mission among the growers, offered a constant and joyous dare, by way of his dim image, in her game of hide-and-seek.

A new person had come to the town while Catherine was still making felt her departure, a strange face with no predecessors. A man, Captain Agnew, had bought a farm at the end of one of the streets, and his daughter, Florence, was presently seen driving about the town in a motor vehicle. She was a large girl, rich in the splendors of vitality, deep of chest and strong of limb. Her eyes were bright and her lips easily flowing. She flung her looks everywhere, careless of them, abun-

dantly centered within herself. Theodosia saw her here and there over the town and talked with her at some gathering. She thought of her again and again as she practised the trills, her present occupation, and she experimented to try to visualize the new face with its looks, its beauty, its rapid sequence of smiles, frowns, and infinities of gesture. The new face had printed itself more cleverly than any other into her mind, and she herself smiled often, remembering the vivid picture that was clear and firm in determination. The new girl had moved swiftly into the life of the town, for in a few days she was seen everywhere. "Is it because she is new to me that I remember her looks?" Theodosia asked herself, waking out of sleep, and suddenly a clear image of Florence, as clear as reality, stood in the core of her inner vision.

It was a puzzle—Florence to be so keenly felt as to retain her pictured form in absence. Theodosia ran swiftly with the spring. Her long slender legs delighted in the daily walk, and in a few weeks there would be tennis on the courts at the Seminary. Stiggins spread onto her mind once as a flat unrecognized affront. Walking past the stable swiftly one bright day she saw his hand as it bent over the collar of a mule to slip a pad into place, a long slender hand, powerful and cunning, like her own hand but more powerful and more steadily placed to its task. The tawny fingers dragged knowingly over the buckles of the collar and then his face, viewed momentarily, was searched care-

lessly in the swift moment of a passing. "Between thee and me there is a great gulf fixed," she thought, and the hour swept quickly by, having gathered nothing from the moment which was dominated by the dark accidental hand.

Florence Agnew grew daily into a personality, heard and felt as well as seen. Hers was a sensual voice, heavy with tone, low, trailing away into finalities. Her body was luxury-loving and radiantly indolent, using but a modicum of its intense vitality for her goings and comings. Her perfect teeth flashed their smile from between her rippling lips and she was alive to the ends of her animal being, which was set to have the best of the town for its own. Her hair was puffed and curled to be a gauze of rippling midnight over her head.

JANE MOORE could do nothing with the Bach. She shook her head self-indulgently at the piano arrangement as if the music were some light joke to confound the keyboard. She touched a key here and there with her fingers but in the end she shrugged as if Bach were a responsibility she could not be asked to assume. Her hat was bright for the spring that delayed, out-dating the spring with its flowers and fragile crêpe. She wanted to talk of Florence continually, and she quoted her with an admiration which would fall suddenly under amused contempt or shock but would build

itself back again in the charm of the unfamiliar. She went daily where Florence went, or she would retail to Theodosia the witty sayings and bold sallies that issued from the flame around which she was impelled to hover.

The days went hurriedly, the birds in the trees at dawn making a continuous breathless fluting, the mockingbird loudest and most insistent. Albert had gone far into the country, traveling from farm to farm, visiting the smaller villages, or he made farther journeys into outlying counties. Theodosia played trills looking at her thin lips in the tall glass of the parlor, searching her lips and her face there.

She had seen Florence that day with a group of people at the pool beyond the town where boats were paddled about. She gave the top of her mind to the trill, the finger pressed firmly down on the string, but underneath a voice recounted Albert's words, hurled them out between the running web of the trill. "Some day I aim to smash that old fiddle into the middle of perdition." Her fingers were joyous over the trill; she and her fingers were one and they would ride together on the top of the world. She comprehended Florence then and dwelt upon her minutely, saw her quick smile that knew all the inner part of a man or of a woman. Albert's voice again: "You're too full of joy. I aim to take some of the joy out of you." The bird tones of the trill crashed over the words and lanced each one with a sharp dart. "Two months from now I aim to do't. Take your time." She had spent a month with the

scales and then had set upon the harmony again, mornings when her pencil dribbled small black egg-shaped dots on the scaffolding set up by the staff and bound them together with a swift down-stroke, her ear hearing tone set upon tone in a fullness of design, the fear in her inner thought, but the fear had slunk away before her new joy and it was now only a dim thing, abstracted, unremembered, too remote to visit any image. Florence Agnew spread pleasure over the town and over the bodies of men and women, and all were more intensely alive. "A week now, I give you. The kind of lover you'll want. I'll close in against the week's done," the words met the bird-singing of the trill that twittered over them and brooded them in kindness. Her mind was suffused with half-knowing, drunk with sense, but her fingers knew their cleverness and the trill lived on while she floated in the reality of consenting fiber and essence. "His strength, it's what I need after all," she said wisely, looking at the chin-piece of the instrument, looking at the threads of the bow, her mouth speaking coolly above the languor of her blood. A day two weeks earlier reappeared to be lived more minutely than in its first appearing, and another day later. The present week cried out for recognition; he had sent her a note from Corinth and another from Mayfair Church. He had called her by the telephone the night before, "To hear the sound of you again," saying, and "Three days and I'll come back.

Mark on your calendar, you better." The voices became entirely real:

"You better mark on your calendar. It'll be a red-letter day, against I come, red for you."

"Will it?"

"You'll see. If you hadn't wanted me you would 'a' stopped me long ago. You can't say I didn't warn you. You'll see."

"Will I?"

"You'll see in three days' time."

CONWAY was coming into the parlor, her "Come" making a recitative as she sang it against the continued trill. He looked at her appealingly and stopped his ears against the shrill high notes.

"Getten ready for a contest?" he asked.

"What you want now?"

"You think too much about Albert. Too much to suit me."

"Albert makes me think. He'll be back tomorrow for sure."

"He's back today. He came back about one o'clock this evening to meet some men here from up the state. Town's full of men from up around Fayette."

"Is he? A sudden change, a new plan. He talked to me last night. He was out at Johntown."

"It's about time you thought about me a little."

"I think about you fifty times a day, Connie."

"Call it fifty."

Conway gathered into his unspecified vagueness and sat distraught in his chair, or he arose and stepped lightly about the room, moving a curtain here or drawing a bowl into the light of the setting sun, closing a shutter, pushing the chair of the blue brocade into the kindest manifestation of the light.

"What's the good of fifty? What kind of fifty."

"I think about you every time I think at all."

"If you marry Albert I'll go off and never come back. This town, it'll never see a sight of me again."

"I wouldn't want you to go."

"Go, I will, you'll see."

"Well."

"I'm like that. I couldn't bear to see you marry Albert. I couldn't bear it. I'll go so far this town'll never hear a buzz of me while time lasts."

"Marry? That's a long way off. I wasn't thinken about marry."

"Go I will. You'll see. A long piece from here. You're the only thing that keeps me here, you and my brother Reg."

Reg was a good friend, a fine boy, she admitted. She looked vaguely at the passing sunlight, speaking aimlessly of Reg.

"I don't care much for a whole mob of people. Don't wish nobody no harm, but all the same . . . I like

you better'n anybody else on earth. I like a few people in a big way. You and Reg most. You most of all. It came to me about a month ago I liked you best, and nothing else I ever did in life amounted to a rap. It seems like nothing else I ever did mattered nohow. That's how I look at it. I been studyen it out a right smart the last few weeks. Not one other God's thing I ever done matters now. No matter what 'twas."

She arose quickly and walked toward the door. Albert would be coming then, soon, the day's work over. Conway walked toward the door beside her.

"Kiss me," she said, leaning slightly near. "You will kiss me and go now. Albert will be here soon. I have to go on an errand for Grandfather. I don't know what I'll do. I haven't been thinken about what you're talken about. You kiss me. Good-bye, Connie."

ALBERT had come back then, sooner than he had expected. Visitors from other counties where tobacco was grown had met in the town, and men from the farms lying close about had been conferring with these. Conway's report of the busy day followed her through the house after his departure. Young women had given their time to the growers' project, typing in the offices, writing letters, carrying the visiting farmers from place to place in their cars. She had kept at home all day and the trills had mounted; she had not known of

the business in the town. "The pool is something, but I am something else," she thought. She made ready for the call her grandfather had asked her to make for him.

When she returned from this errand Albert was at hand; he had been let in by Horace and was sitting relaxed in his chair, recounting his day.

"I'm dead tired," he said, when they were alone. He began to tell of his journey through three counties. His eyes were weary and listless, heavily troubled, and his voice was monotonous. Under his apathetic gaze he seemed to be looking at her lazily or sadly, as if he were sad for the weariness that now oppressed him.

"Back to Corinth, Monday that was, and then on to Mayfair. . . . Broke an axle and got stuck in a mud hole. . . . On to Johntown. . . . Over to Richelieu. . . . Back to Johntown. . . . By that time it was last night." He seemed to be looking at her with some extra vision that shone from under the gaze of his shifting eyes.

"Already been all up in around Payne Lick and over beyond the Ridge. Over into the far side of the river. Had no sleep for a week till last night. Slept last night like a log."

Theodosia sat on the chair of the blue cushions and the parlor was arranged as Conway had left it, as he had settled it to the afternoon light. Albert seemed suffused in sadness now, and the tale of his wanderings in behalf of the farmers would scarcely hold together

longer. The end of the week had come and the end of his odyssey. The day in the town with eminent speakers from outside followed, touched sparingly. He had arrived soon after noon. He had worked all afternoon in one of the offices, seeing men. There was a greater plan for coöperative selling on foot, a tight pool. Finally he said:

“You know Florence Agnew?”

“Oh, yes, I know her.”

“Do you like her?”

“How do I know? . . . I don’t have to like her, do I?”

“What you think about her looks?”

“Oh, she’s a beauty, I guess. Yes, I’m sure of it. She’s a real beauty.”

“How many times you seen Florence?” he asked.

“All week. I’ve been to the reservoir when she was there and all over town. At a party one day. Eight or ten times, a dozen maybe, I’ve seen Florence, I reckon.”

“I’ve seen her only once.”

“Today?”

“All the rest of the day after I came. She was in Kirk’s office to write for the pool men, she and Ruth and one or two more.”

She had reached for the fiddle and was touching the strings without a sound. He said that he was tired as a dog and that he would go home and go to bed. He looked at her covertly, oppressed with weariness or some other burden. “I ought to ‘a’ gone straight home,

but I just thought I'd drop by." His old smile, touched with some bitterness or sadness, went over his face for a moment and he took his hat from the table.

"So long," he said. "I'm off."

ALBERT and Florence were coming in at the doorway. It was the day after his return. He was richly alive, his life leaping within him, and Florence's deep low voice was cutting to the end of the parlor, to the end of the hallway, as Theodosia came down the staircase to meet them.

They were sitting on the black haircloth divan toward the piano, and Theodosia sat on the blue chair opposite, giving them her searching interest, questioning, lending her low laugh to their hearty laughter. Florence Agnew's lips had the ripples of water. "The flesh beside her mouth is a pearl with life in it," Theodosia was thinking, and the event was gathering swiftly. Florence rested continually upon her beauty, luxuriating upon it, and her quick eyes went frequently to Albert's eyes where they continued some former contact and some growing knowledge. They were telling of the day before, of the afternoon spent among the growers, and they had many incidents to recall, droll sayings, laughter, droll prejudices, caricatures of close-handed men. When their eyes met, Theodosia knew that she was forgotten. Once she arose quickly,

murmuring some apology, and left the room. She walked the length of the cabinets of the Indian flints and looked through the glass, seeing nothing beyond. She stared at a stone hatchet, seeing no meaning beyond the outline. When she went back to the parlor they were sitting apart, Albert on the chair by the window, and she knew from some look of ease that enveloped them that they had had their caress. After that the talk lay quietly among the matters of the town, gossip of this one or that, but it flowed back to the farmers again and settled among the percentages and statistics.

"Is the pool assured?" Theodosia asked, and Albert seemed lost for the moment in some remote shock, seemed dazed as she came back thus into her former relation to the pool, to her interest in it. Her final report of it came through Florence Agnew.

"Oh, yes, it is," Florence said. "Isn't it, Albert?"

"Oh, yes, a sure thing now. All set."

Their eyes were building between them again and their laughter was renewed. They went away laughing over the stories they had told, retelling themselves. Theodosia let them pass beyond the door of the room and then she began to push the chairs into place and to arrange the shutters. She took her instrument from its case and tested a string, but her ear was dead to tone as her limbs were dead to feeling. Then Albert ran back through the doorway and stood beside her.

"You see how it is with me, Theodosia?"

“Yes.”

“I brought her here so’s you’d see. For yourself.”

“I see.”

“She’s out at the gate to wait for me.”

There was a quiet space while she drew at the string, her ear deaf to the tone, but her fingers tinkering knowingly.

“Good-bye,” he said.

She had no reply for this. Her words were caught in her stiff throat, whatever they might have been. He began to walk toward the door, going slowly, on tip-toe, whispering something. He went toward the door aimlessly, moving uncertainly, bent forward under some burden or pain. Then he said, whispering from the doorway:

“Good-bye.

“Good-bye, Theodosia,” still whispering.

“Why, good-bye,” she said aloud, smiling toward him. “Good-bye, Albert. Good-bye.”

HER hands were dull and wooden over the trills and she laid the instrument aside. Fear and pain mounted in her mind and she wandered over the house or sat stiffly in a chair. Fear that had been allayed arose and multiplied, meeting other curious hurts and shames, meeting pride in a vortex of confusion. Toward nightfall she went from the house quickly and

walked through Crabtree Lane, away from the chief avenue of the town. She turned into Hill Street and passed among the small cabins that were lined along the unpaved roadway. The people of the street were leaning over their fences or sitting in their doorways. They looked at her searchingly as she went by, their slightly averted eyes asking what had brought her there. When she had passed ten or twelve cabins she saw Americy sitting on a doorstep. There was a low gate before the door of the house, and Theodosia came near to this and laid her hands upon it before she was discovered. Americy was touching the strings of a guitar uncertainly and making a chord or two, and as she strummed she was singing softly. She looked up when the hands were shaken on the gate and stopped her strumming, and when she saw Theodosia she cast her eyes upward in surprised questioning and embarrassment.

"You need one chord more," Theodosia said. "Let me show you. One chord, like this." She had gone within the gate and was sitting on the step beside Americy now. "One chord more is all. To make the song go."

"You needn't to bother. I don't play nohow. I was just a-picken a little bit. I can't play."

"It's like this," Theodosia said. She sat on the step beside Americy and took the guitar out of her hands. "You put in this one, and then the first again, and see, it all rounds out and makes the song go better." The

guitar felt greasy in her hands and it smelt of the brown girl's fingers. Americy was reticent, not eager to try the chord, afraid or hostile, but Theodosia urged her to take the instrument again. When the new chord was needed she placed the fingers on the strings, and Americy yielded although her mind groped in a gloom and did not learn the new way easily. Her brows were smooth and sharply cut but her mouth was heavy and her chin dull and clumsy. The dark splotches on her face were much less prominent than Theodosia had remembered.

"Who taught you to play?" Theodosia asked.

"A boy I know taught me, but I don't play none nohow. I can't play."

"Where's Lethe?"

"I don't know. Somewheres down town."

"Does Lethe live here with you?"

"What you want here? What you come here for?"

"I heard you play and I just stopped by."

Americy fumbled with the new chord and found it. The other people of the street had turned into their doors and the dark had suddenly come close. Theodosia was searching for some pretext for returning and her mind reverted to its loathing and gloated on its disgust. She wanted to see Americy minutely, to search her to the roots of her life and her being, and she dwelt on the chord hoping that it would yield a way. She lingered over the latching of the gate, making efforts to

approach the other, turning her hands about on the deeply weathered pickets of the fence. She thought that she might make some exchange with Americy on the basis of the music and thus gain some commerce with her. She spoke easily when the idea shaped itself into an offer, a direct appeal.

"I need somebody to do some work for me, a little laundry work, crêpe-de-chine things, nightgowns, petticoats, slips. I'll teach you the chords in trade, if you'll do it." She bargained, encouraged by Americy's interest and willingness. "I'll show you some chords you can use to play a dozen songs, easy chords too." Americy was acquiescent. They arranged that Theodosia would bring the garments and come for them when they were ready.

At home again Theodosia selected the clothing at once, some delicately embroidered undergarments of silk, presents from Ruth and Jane. Beyond her interest in the clothing she could not have a mind for any other matter, and she sat beyond the curtains of an upper window looking down on the street unseen, her eyes unseeing, nor would she answer any voice that called up the steps to her. She carried the garments to Hill Street the day after her first visit there. The small house was heavy with steam and the odors of human sweat, of drying clothing. She was fearful of Lethe, but she had gone in the early morning with the hope of seeing her. Americy was cordial in her greeting. She

leaned over the clothing admiringly or she appraised the pieces to make an estimate of the time they would require.

"If five's too many," Theodosia said, "I'll leave only four, or maybe three. How about four?"

"I'd as lief do five as not. Leave all, you can. I don't mind."

Lethe had come out of the kitchen and stood behind them. When Theodosia turned about she was standing near looking over their arms at the garments tossed upon the table. She was a matured woman, heavy-breasted but light on her feet. Theodosia saw that she had not remembered her face accurately, that she had remembered it too much in its attitude of unpassionate refusal. Lethe was larger than Americy, more settled and determined by life. Her hands were long, making long lines where they lay, the one on her breast and the other at her hip, strong hands, but little marked by their labor. Her face was long and was pointed slightly at the chin, a heavy face, moving from moment to moment, changing from curiosity, suspicion, hate, admiration, undefined emotions blended and divided. She was darker than Americy. Her hair was combed back and parted, but a few black kinky spirals of it resisted the parting and lay on her forehead. She looked from Theodosia to the clothing on the table, back and forth, and said in a low voice that came from one corner of her lips:

"What is it she wants, Americy?"

"She wants these-here pieces washed."

"Charge her a plenty," she said.

"I'll pay money," Theodosia said, and she was ashamed then that she had proposed any other bargain. She turned to Americy and said, "What's it worth, those pieces?"

"Miss Theodosia said she'd teach me how to play," Americy said.

"What does she want here?" Lethe said.

"Have you time enough to play the chords now, Americy?" Theodosia asked quickly. "Get the guitar. Where is it?"

Americy had remembered the chords from the last teaching although she was shy to sing the song through before Lethe's hostile presence. She hummed the tune, sitting on the edge of the bed. Theodosia glanced down then and saw the small frayed foot-mat under Americy's feet and saw that the room was cluttered with poor, ill-used things, a chair rudely mended, another chair that had lost its under-structure and was propped upon a small box. The walls had been roughly plastered and were hung with ugly and useless bric-à-brac, cast-away ornaments from the homes of the whites. A red plush couch behind the door was neatly laid with ironed clothing.

"Lethe sang it along with me last night," Americy said. "It goes a sight better if two sing. Lethe can sing a right smart better'n I can nohow. Lethe can sing."

"Come on, Lethe, and sing," Theodosia said. "Americy says you can sing. Come on."

"I can't no such thing," Lethe said, but her manner was more warm. She moved away toward the small fireplace, her hands now folded under her bosom, her mind set upon some pleasant inner sense of herself, her steps slow and aimless. "I can't sing so fine as Americy makes out."

Lethe went into the other room of the cabin and did not return. Theodosia sang the song with Americy and then showed her two chords more, and tried to teach her to tune her instrument. "I'll pay you money too for the work," she said. "How'd I ever come to forget that?" Americy seemed aimless and pale after the passion of the older woman. While Americy struggled with the chords a man came in at the door, a strong dark man in the prime of life. He glanced a moment toward Americy as he stood by the closed door and became slightly deferential when his glance fell upon Theodosia, but his manner was familiar as he walked across the floor and took some small thing from the bureau, as he passed into the inner room.

"You don't need to pay no money," Americy said. "We'll have it like we said we would."

"Do you and Lethe live here? Nobody else?" Theodosia asked.

"Me and Lethe. And Ross."

"What's Lethe's name? Is Lethe married?"

"Her name is the same as mine is, Froman. That's

her name. Lethe Froman. Or she goes by the name of Lethe Ross."

Theodosia went soon after. She left Americy standing by the table picking at the delicate laces of the garments with pleased scrutiny.

SITTING above in her chamber she saw the hill fields beyond the town as the light of the sunset withdrew from the valley and spread laterally over the plowed spaces that were ready now for the tobacco and the corn. Her own uncertainty spread to become the uncertainty of the passing light that lingered wanly, renewed itself, or was diffused into the somber twilight. Presently she was looking out upon the uncertainty of trees and gloom which was lit in feeble masses here and there by the street-lights. Long after this she prepared for bed by the indefinite light of her lamp, which made a hard and futile glow that subtended remote black shadows. When she slept the hour was late. She fell into a confused dream that centered about Albert, who leaned toward her from a bank giving her flowers that he had plucked from beyond a fence, who walked before her down a long hall, passing farther away, moving toward the inevitable disaster of doors. Beyond this vivid image lay another, vaguely merged with it but more remote, a picture under a picture, a large awkward collie dog floundering before her in a path, moving away from her toward some fixed limit, and in

her inner being lay a disgust of him and a loathing that fulfilled itself in a sudden sob of thankfulness when he passed beyond her view. The passing form became then Conway with a laugh in his eyes and pleasure in his words, but when he leaned near her to kiss he became Albert, who caught her away into an unhappy fulfilment for which she wept even in the deep trance of dream.

Later, long after, it seemed, into her sleep came a flat muffled sound as if it were the shape of a peal of alarm, falling long and dull against the enduring quality of her torpor. It was shaped, the sound, like the fire alarm of the town, insistent and reiterated, but it fell toneless upon her deadened senses. It seemed to her that she had slept very long when it came again, that it was more perpetual, blurred into her dream with matter that clotted and cluttered weary thought, timbers laid into mind, shapeless and unwieldy masses set into a mind fixed upon sleep. A brief annoyance arose with each curiously shaped flat tone, annoyance that any matter should reiterate itself as if it had importance above any other matter, but she did not stir in her bed or know any real beyond the cluttering wooden masses of cry that had some relation to the village fire alarm, some foolish senseless likeness. When the shapes finally ceased she became aware of their withdrawal and missed them with a small distress that half awakened her, but later she slept again.

CONWAY was burned to death that night when his father's house was destroyed. Theodosia had the news of this disaster from Siver when he came to kindle the fire in her grate; there was a hint of late frost in the air. She waked from unrested sleep when Siver fumbled with the wood and the coal, when he fumbled with the door latch. She turned on her pillow as he waited at the doorway, as he looked away from the bed uncertainly, his head leaned forward, preparing a disclosure.

"What is it?" she asked. She knew he had something to tell. "Tell it, Siver. Has Aunt Bet got a misery this morning? Do you have to cook the breakfast?"

He told her then as he worried with the latch. Mr. Dudley Brooke's house had burned. "Towarge midnight," he said.

"Mr. Dudley Brooke's house," he said. He lingered at the door, half closing it, drifting in and out of the doorway, looking at the floor where the bright light of the fire danced in brilliant yellow, averting his eyes from her.

She was sitting up in the bed now, the coverlets thrown aside, her passion to know what Siver had been saying over and over leaping the space that had been set between them by their offices as mistress and houseman. She asked rapid questions, impatient of the replies which came as if they had been known before, came to her ears as routine once the first great fact had assailed her.

"Mr. Conway, he got burned up too, got burned to death in the house, clean to death," Siver said.

He stood in the doorway, rubbing his hand on the wood of the frame, mumbling his story over and over beyond the the low flare of her repeated questions. Suddenly her mind became clear again after the fog of surprise. It was true that Siver had dreamed the story.

"You dreamed all this, Siver. You're not awake yet."

"You can smell the smoke out in the trees for your own self and you can smell the burn outside, if you go out. They got his body out towarge day and put it in a coffin and took it over to Mr. Eli Brooke's house, his uncle's house. You can see the smoke out in the trees and you can smell of the fire . . ."

The report was then a confirmation; the coffin, when Siver spoke of it, settled the truth into her. She arose and dressed herself for the day and later she met the music teacher in the parlor and played the lesson with mechanical care.

When the obligation of the lesson was done she went to her room and later she lay on her bed to stare at the ceiling until her grief took shape. At first there were three Conways to play back and forth in her mind, the Conway of the first fact, as he had been Friday evening and many another evening, charming, negligent, beautiful to see, kissing her at the door, flinging her a smile from beyond the lamp. Over against this lay the awful second fact, Conway a charred,

shrunken ember lying in a coffin which no one dared open, which would never again be opened. This was Conway. Up the street half a mile, in an avenue of trees to a doorway, through a hall and a parlor, and there lay the horrible fact. She was not afraid of it. It was real, there, never to be denied, and if he could endure it so could she. The second fact was hers now. The third fact grew together, gaining strength as the minutes passed, dominating all the rest. This was Conway become a memory. The third fact had already begun to supplant the first. The fact of him as a memory, as finished, as perpetual now and unchanged, stole over the first and dimmed it. At this recognition she wept with more pain and reached for the first fact with greater eagerness, but the third prevailed until the first became an utter shadow and went before the day was done.

She lay on her bed, spent with weeping, remembering now the alarms of the night and knowing that they had been the last cry of Conway's circumstance. She probed her memory of the night to penetrate its knowledge for every substance and sound, and she remembered the flat toneless matter that had cluttered her rest. She turned continually to Albert as the one who must give her comfort and ease her pain, and her longing for him became perpetual. She knew that he had gone across the state on some mission, but she thought that he would come to Conway's funeral when he learned of the disaster. Over and over she decided that

she would send him a message telling him to come, and she thought of his grief as identical with her own. Conway had been their friend, Albert's first, and through Albert her own. She would weep anew to recall how much the two of them had loved Conway. But she kept to a passive rôle and sent no message. Albert did not come. He had been traveling all week into remote countries and was not easily reached by the telegraphed communications which someone sent.

The days passed slowly while her life seemed suspended in grief, days scarcely noticed until many of them were gone and Conway had become the last fact utterly, had achieved dissolution. He lay intangible now among the elements of a past that had slipped by while she was unaware.

JANE MOORE came once or twice after she and Theodosia had sat together to talk of Conway's death, but presently she was occupied with other friends who lived out the Olivet Pike and with these she had begun to go to Sulphur Springs, where there was a hotel and a pavilion for dancing. Frank would come to sit, stopping on his way from the town, or he would offer a bit of rowing on the pool beyond the fairgrounds. She went again and again to see Americy, and she would sit quietly on the chair opposite while Americy ironed for an hour, watching her motions and her changing

face. Americy would talk with a slight embarrassment of one thing and another, and Theodosia would look intently at her skin, her looks, her clouded eyes, her hand on the iron, the still veins in her moving wrist where the blood must surely throb. A faint sickness would spread over her, so delicate as to be scarcely perceived, but she would cling to her act of penetration, probing to come nearer to the life under the brown flesh. She would watch Americy's finger bones as they articulated in moving the iron and in settling the linen in a smooth path before her. She would ask all she dared of her life, her men, her lovers.

"Who's your fellow now, Americy?"

"Aw, go on!"

"Your man, who is he now?"

"I got no man now."

"You got a beau, you know you have."

In the word, beau, she would edge away from a direct scrutiny of Americy's affairs, diverting the question to gain more space for the discussion. "You know you've got a beau. Who takes you places?"

Americy was embarrassed. "I goes by my own self. I don't need no beau."

Looking at Americy's drooping eyelids she would try to detect the nature of her wish, her pleasure, to go into her bosom and know its need, into her body, her limbs, her passive presence. Americy had had many men, that she knew. Did she have more than one at a time, she would wonder, and again she would

plead with the brown veins at the wrist above the smoothing iron, with the swaying gestures of the hand above the board, to know what was the quality of the passion that bent Americy to her way of life, pity and pride and tenderness making within herself an emotion which might have been called love. Lethe was usually gone from the house, for she was working as a cook somewhere. If she were at hand she kept aloof, but even in her absence she was more easily comprehended as holding more direct passions.

"You could bring your clo's for me to do same as always," Americy said. "You learned me to play and I'd as lief as not do up your clo's all time."

Americy had mastered the chords slowly, but she liked to drone the songs that were sung at the church, and Theodosia helped her to set the tunes to the guitar—*Beulah Land, I Saw My Jesus, Tell It Again, Come Sinner Come, and Glory to His Name*. Once when Theodosia saw her own face in the dim glass above Americy's bureau she searched it there, in this strange place. "Lethe hates me," she thought on the instant, seeing her thin curving lips. It seemed to her that she lived with only a part of her being, that only a small edge of her person lifted up into the light of the day. "Lethe hates me," she thought, and her mind was fascinated by Lethe's strong will and by her indifferent enmity that was manifested by her continued absence from the cabin. Feeling herself a commonplace, she left the music when the needs of it were

satisfied and went again to sit before Americy's ironing table and listen to her reserved disclosures. "What am I to her?" she would question, searching into the relation of flesh to flesh.

She turned again and again to Albert, remembering Conway, clung to him in her suffering and implored him silently to come to her, to reconcile her to the loss. He was from the town much of the time, but, returned, he was seen continually with Florence now. Theodosia rejected Florence from her passion; since Conway's loss she was of no account although she was allowed, recognized. Albert might choose and have whomever he would; this was no matter. But continually she listened for his step on the gallery floor and for his voice in the hallway. Walking to Americy's cabin in the bright sun of a midday, she would suddenly see his strong firm hand, sunburned and full of power, taking its heavy certain being in gestures or in quiet. She thought that he would surely come some day to sit quietly with her, to talk with her sadly of Conway. She determined that she would contrive to see Albert again although each plan for an encounter was at once rejected. Americy would push her iron over a reach of damp cloth and leave a smooth trail of steaming surface behind, delicately pleased but embarrassed at the visit, and she would talk guardedly, disclosing as little as she might of her life and the life of Lethe. Sitting before her, watching the magic of the iron as it turned rough garments into smooth, Theodosia would know

that she must somehow meet Albert again, that she would send him some message which would bring him to her door.

Once when she had brought her freshened clothing home, when she unrolled the papers from about it and prepared it for the drawer, she saw that a garment had been torn apart. The frayed piece was an underslip which was decorated with lace and fine stitchery. It had been torn open by an angry hand; one great tearing motion had sundered it from the hem to the embroidered upper portion where the enforced stitching had given it strength to resist the angry rending hands. It was frayed in many directions when renewed strength had been set upon it, and she knew that it had stood in the way of some quarrel between Americy and Lethe, that it had been torn apart by Lethe's hands. She tossed the destroyed garment into a trash basket.

She returned over and over to her need to have Albert come, to have him satisfy some longing by coming through her door and sitting a half-hour in her parlor, but each suggestion her mind made toward the promotion of this imperfectly formed wish was repelled. Her divided wishes, the one prompted by her scorn of him, the other by her strange need, defeated each other continually. Once in a moment of clear-seeing she thought, with a flash of cruel wit, that her real need of him was her need to express to him her contempt of him and her indifference of his way, but this moment was fogged as, day after day, her sense of him yearned

toward him. She knew of his coming and going, in and out of the town, with intuitive accuracy. But one day the news of his marriage with Florence spread over the town. They had gone away together and would live thereafter in Lexington, Albert's work being now centered in that city.

It seemed to her that some barrier had come between her and the violin, as if the instrument were vaguely at fault in that it had allowed some intrusion. At intervals some words of the teacher had touched on the limits of the capacity of her hand. Casually once, as she turned the pages of some catalogue and wrote numbers on a paper, the teacher had said, "Beyond you," or again, "The fingering beyond your reach," or "Out of your reach." These phrases built a deep unrest in Theodosia's days. She went to sit before Americy's iron and talk of Americy's life, her hymns, her revivals, her chords, her work. As a commonplace having some relation to the early summer, she arose each morning and set about her tasks. Her playing was tentative, obeying only the suggestions of the teacher, withdrawing from searchings and explorations. The instrument had retreated from her old knowledge of it. She accomplished with skill all that the teacher required and heard the praise she earned with a leap of satisfaction within. She rested upon her perfections where they

lay bounded and within her degree, and she surpassed herself at the designated tasks.

She went to the hill overlooking the town, to the spot where Conway was buried, taking Frank to walk there with her. The grave was near the brow of the hill on the side that sloped back from the town, slightly under the top of the rise where the enclosure looked toward the hill farms beyond. She walked about in the summer grass, which was tall now, much of it in blossom, and she heard in some dim way the talk Frank made as he sauntered by her side, as he spoke of Conway, of the grass, of the pine trees, as he quoted something about pines and grass. The high points of the town stood visible off to the north, and the church steeples arose among the tall trees, and a bit of the roof of the Seminary. To the south the graves dipped up and down with the flow of the near hillside and fell away at a fence where a rose clung, but beyond the rose lay a field of oats, ready to cut. It was a strange place in which to find Conway, and a renewed aspect of him arose with a new flavor. The mockingbird that sang on the fence near the rose began to partake of him. The tall grass waved in the late afternoon sun, swaying about throughout the entire graveyard, even over the new mould that had covered him but a few months. The town stretched away to an immeasurable distance, and the song of the mockingbird became the atmosphere one breathed, a touched substance, giving life to the breath of man, set about the earth to flow

with the winds. The tall swaying grass with its sunlight was the people of the earth, the reason for the continuance of the world. When Frank spoke she folded his words together, having subtracted from them their meaning, and dropped them over the brow of the hill beyond the reach of the grass, beyond the mockingbird's song.

"This grass needs to be cut, I declare," he said. "It's a shame. It looks as bad as a wilderness."

"It's tall. Everywhere. In bloom," she said. "There might be a field-lark somewhere."

"It's the fault of the committee. There are some things . . ."

She had folded his words together at the moment of her reply and dropped them beyond the sublimated air of the hilltop. The third fact of Conway prevailed now to its last power and had shared now with every beautiful object which her mind might entertain. The former world had departed, shrunken to a minute size in its going, flattened to commonplace, gone with the departed town, the old air, the trite matter of talk. Because she had never before brought Conway into this intense relation with the song of a bird and with the grass, the act brought him nearer each instant. The sense of her losses lay above the hilltop world which was aerated by the mockingbird's song, and it spread as a cloud drawing nearer, a desolation as yet to be realized.

"Everybody liked him," Frank said. "He was just

like his brother Reginald. Everybody likes Reg. It was careless to leave a lamp all night under an incubator, wasn't it? It's queer nobody heard the explosion."

"Let's sit here a little while, under this pine tree. On the grass."

"I went to the creek to fish one summer with a party, Conway in the lot. I remember how we laughed and talked all the best part of a night once, a big log fire, and how Conway looked, by the fire, in the light of the blaze. Laughed till he shook all over when Albert told the one about the deacon up at Elijah Church. Did you ever hear Albert tell about Deacon Pope's prayer?"

"No. Or maybe I have. I don't know."

She sat under the pine tree, inattentive to Frank's story, lost in a haze of grief which was no less ever-present because she did not know exactly where it centered. She knew that if Frank had not been present she should actually have wept, but that he held the flow of her grief intact with some hushing power, that his presence called for definite tears, exactly wept, committed to a future which she had now obliterated.

Alone in her room when the walk was over, she remembered the beauty of the hilltop and the sublimated air of the bird's song, and the grass that swung backward in the late afternoon sunlight. As her memory grew more intense, dwelt upon, the intensity of her grief multiplied, gathered now into a passion for Conway, whom she was free to mourn and long for. She

remembered every gesture and posture of his body, conned each one to bring it back to being, and focused about his jealousy, which had become precious now, and about his bitter, hurt replies, that fell the more poignantly in that they were surrounded by his lightness and carelessness. She was free to love him and to want him. Her hate of Albert inverted itself and became an intense passion for Conway. She searched for a small picture of him, turning out boxes and drawers in a state of violent grief which centered half the night about the finding of this small physical token. When she had found it she set it upon her mantel in the place of honor from which she had withdrawn pictures of Albert, of Ruth, and of Jane.

Preoccupied with her grief she took less account of the town. Jane came no more to sit on her piano bench and twitter at the notes of the music, or if she came to the portico for a brief call she seemed business-like, abstracted, mirthless. Ruth had found diversions in another street. She saw them clearly now. They had liked her sincerely, in their ways, but they had liked her as a means of access to Conway and Albert. They had poured their friendship over her for this.

SHE practised in her chamber now, above the street, close to the lower boughs of the great elm tree, remote from interruption, and in her zeal Conway kept with

her in mind, delighting with her in each graceful run and in each whispering trill. She would speak to him continually, commenting on each effort and each achievement, assuming him in mind as a companion. "You hear that?" she would say, or "How's that for a few first-hand remarks on the joy of being above the ground? Of running around the wheel of the seasons?" Or, inarticulate before what she did, articulating only with the cry of the strings, she felt such rush of impulse as would say: Here in this succession of sound cries out a sorrow greater than our personal sorrows, the sorrow of the whole of man at finding himself in an earth addicted to time. As would say: Here in the adagio man spreads out the infinite tentacles of his multiform being, his personality, and lays, kind for kind, each sensitive feeler upon a like that protrudes from the Source. As would say: This theme, a pastoral from some central-European rolling plain, is ours as we sit in the heart of this land where the seasons rise and fall in waves, a melancholy procession, and men mark their time with their labor as they roll the soil over from year to year endlessly plowing. Conway was with her in these articulations, in the breath of her throat, in the beat of her right hand over the gut wires. The people went by, fluttering to the county fair and back, and August was over. A disaster from the outside world, reported, passed over the town and left a ripple of hysteria. Theodosia played in her chamber, except on the day set for the appearance of her mas-

ter, above the shock of the street, above the calamity, relating her carefully guarded playing, guardedly within its bounds, to Conway. The town had begun to rumble of a mishap of its own.

Through the buying and selling of the town, the greetings and passings here and there, a mishap had begun to be felt. A young woman, a girl named Minnie Harter, was known to be bearing a child. Whispers of this had floated over the gossip of the streets and the porches. Minnie was a plump soft girl who limped slightly when she walked. She lived with her parents at the end of the street, near the house where Conway had lived. Whispers said that she had had too many intimates. The long roadway up the avenue under the trees now led to Minnie's door as the shock of her ill-doing mounted and frayed out to a settled fact. The rumor of Minnie came upon Theodosia as she worked over the adagio one summer morning, or it faintly colored her sense of her act as she darned the household linens that were now worn and thin. Looking intently at the lapping threads of the cloth as she darned, she penetrated the folding lines of cotton, one up and one down, over and over, they unsatisfied and completed in one instant, and she searched minutely into the flash of recognition that had accompanied her first seeing when reality had lain on the instant just behind the warp and weft of these accurately braided lines of old worn cloth. "Some truth is near at hand," she thought, striving to regain the acumen of the lost mo-

ment. She became more cool and more abstracted, passing to another mood regarding her playing, as if some cold disinterested part stood outside herself. In this, temper she searched into the limitations of her hand, at the end of an hour of duos with her master, and pried out each truth, flinching from nothing, testing her reach as if it were the reach of some other musician, some hand remote from her in which she had only a curious interest.

"And that marks the limit of what you can do in that direction. . . . Your mind can go beyond your hand. . . ." The master made her points clear.

Theodosia leaned over the instrument, her mind cool before these words, a sensation as of a keen blade cutting a cold path down her back near her spine. "Then I'll make a new instrument," her sad arrogance said. Determination yielded nothing before the words of her master. "I'll not be stopped," she said. "If this instrument can't serve me . . . I'm still here."

At practice her mind turned continually to Conway, relating to him the curious limitations of musical machines, tools, implements, and retold to him her predicament in half-amused despair that yielded nothing. "We're here," she said, addressing Song, taking Conway with her as she walked impudently up to the face of Song. "They can remake the thing," she said. "They must make a new kind. . . . You're not done with us yet."

THE summer was passing. Mr. Reed called on Anthony again, sitting with him in the shade of the gallery, and after his departure Theodosia felt the renewed distress that had settled over her grandfather's day. Ruth Robinson came but seldom now, or if she came she seemed vague, matter-of-fact, unlovely, pre-occupied, ready to go soon after her coming. "Ours is a dull house now," Theodosia thought, and she turned again to her grandfather's need. She decided to stop her lessons for a time, for she was afraid that the bill would never be paid. She scarcely dared to give her distrust of her grandfather's further ability to pay as a reason for her act, and so she asked for a vacation. She was in need of a rest, she said. She stressed her weariness and recalled that the summer had been very warm. Having established the season of vacation with the teacher, she said, "I will pay whatever is owed. You may send the bill to me."

One or two students had applied to her for tuition, and presently another came, boys who were too immature in their talent to interest her own teacher, and she thought that after a little she might find a class of beginning students in the town. She practised many hours, relating her playing over and over to her devotion to Conway, glancing at his beautiful pictured face. "We're here," she said, addressing Song with her mind where the value of a phrase was tasted even before it was played and where harmonies were heard. She took delight in the lyric quality of the instrument and in her

running fingers, and she had a pensive happiness in the running, singing parts she played, or she supplied a second-fiddle part in her thought, her ear leaning inwardly to listen. The whispers of the town came but faintly into her intense preoccupations. "I can't be called upon to decide the paternity of Minnie Harter's youngone," she said, addressing the town as she set her bow over the strings, a cruel saying, as she knew, as she commented upon all cruelty then with plucked wires. "Her lameness has set her apart," the plucked strings said, "and her isolation has made her wanton."

"A smart say-so," her own lips replied to the last speaker. "It's easy to summarize other people in their talents and ways. It's all, likely, not so easy to Minnie Harter herself." The dialogue continued.

The whispers of the town became less hushed. They began to penetrate her chamber or to meet her in her walks, to meet her in Frank's diligent talk of other matters. The settled fact, accepted by the town, came accidentally upon her in her passing to and fro, came from Aunt Bet, from Siver's shuffled tread and shifted glance, from Americy's lowered eyelids. Horace brought the last bold word, the summary. Minnie Harter had called out a name in the hour of birth.

"I see by the papers that Conway was acquainted with Minnie," Horace said. "Did you know Minnie, Dosia?"

"Oh, yes. At school, I knew her."

"Oh, incomparable brown eyes and the lispen tongue. Just enough limp to make her, you might say, ap-pealen. 'Oh, wait for me, Minnie,' and her walk said, 'I'll wait.' Conway knew Minnie. All the town in a whisper. Simplest thing on earth. Not worth one damn 'hush.' Easy to know and lived next door."

"The story they tell, it's not true," she said softly. "It's not true."

Some part of her knowledge of which she had not been taking account seemed to be speaking to her suddenly out of a confused dark, speaking, rejecting, foretelling. Indignation and pain clouded her thinking, and her protective sense surrounded all that was left of Conway so that she spoke angrily, arisen now to become a flame of anger. "It's not true. Minnie Harter lied. What is there to do? . . . In the face of the town what can I do?"

HER business with the three students occupied very much of her time, for she helped them generously with their practice. She knew that the report Minnie Harter had made was not true. It might have been true in the nature of the earth, but it was not in this case true. On the second day after her talk with Horace she knew again within herself that the report was untrue. She was busy all day mending under-garments for Anthony. Cotton cloth drawn together

with sewing thread, scrutinized minutely, told her a final thing about the form of yarn which was in reality floating undevised lint brought into a line by spinning, bound together in a knitted chain of net. The lint floated from the design in a continual wasting, perpetual dissolution, and her own mind strove to bind its own threads, to regather its lint and impose some well-knit conclusions into the chaos. On the third day she knew again that the story was untrue. Minnie Harter had, she divined, claimed Conway as it were out of the grave to give herself a posthumous romance, a right lover. With this story she would arise in dignity in the town. The infant had been still-born and after a little all but the richly tragic parts of the drama would be forgotten.

Passing in her room, Theodosia observed that she had removed Conway's picture from her shelf although she scarcely remembered the act. It had been put into a box of photographs, taken up without passion and slipped inside the cover of the box at some casual moment between coming and going. She laughed once a swift, cruel laughter that bent downward the corners of her mouth at the spectacle of two women quarreling over a dead man, herself one. She discovered that she had no quarrel beyond that induced by friendly loyalty. A suspicion grew in the arising confusion of her thought that her own posthumous passion for Conway had been identified with her lost hope of the fiddle, with her tenderness and self-love that had been shield-

ing her limitation from inner examination and despair. The story remained untrue, but Conway grew remote for her, increasing in remoteness as three days wore away. The shock of the argument opened new vistas down into the dark of her inner thought. She remembered him tenderly, as dead, as wronged in his grave. She thought of him less often.

FOUR

SHE ran out of the house at dusk, her fiddle in her hand, fiddle and bow clutched in her fingers. She went rapidly down the street, thinking that she would walk toward the pool, toward the fields, toward some point far beyond the town. She would hurl fiddle-playing into the tops of tall trees and hurl it again into the darkening sky. The ripples of the water would be black and the plowed fields would be black where the dusk had sunk into the autumn furrows.

Before the livery stable she saw Stiggins, who stood listlessly, his hands in his pockets, swaying unevenly from one foot to the other. The wind that would have blown the dark water of the pool was shifting the straws and trash of the stable about before Stig's feet, making a shallow drift in the dirt and refuse.

"Come on with me, Stig," she said. "Come and go with me where I go."

He shuffled uncertainly, hearing her words slowly. "Come on now, Stiggins," she said.

She turned about and went toward Hill Street, Stiggins following after her a few steps. It was the hour when the street-lights were not yet lit and the people who passed were gray undistinguished motions drifting

unevenly through the fog of the first-dark. Now and then as she went she called to Stiggins and was assured that he was following by his shuffling uneven steps that quickened at each cry. She went to Lethe's cabin and knocked at the door, and at Americy's call she went inside, passing swiftly over the threshold. Stig remained on the doorstep staring, but after a moment he crouched in the doorway. Americy brought a chair to the middle of the floor and offered it without a greeting. Then she went to sit on the bed, her accustomed place, and Lethe turned slightly about from the table, where food had been eaten. A few crusts of bread lay on a plate, but the other dishes were empty. Lethe was sullen, sitting turned away from the door, and when Theodosia was seated she moved slightly and spoke with contempt, speaking softly.

"You come here and all the town will be a-talken. You want the town to be a-talken about you-all? What you want t'start up everybody a-talken about you for?"

"What's to talk about now?"

Stig began to mumble half-articulate words, looking at the floor with a strange smile about his eyes. "A leetle scrop to eat, a leetle leavens. All I want is a leetle mess to eat. The pickens on a ham bone is good, the pickens on a ham bone. Have you-all got e'er ham bone around? All I want . . ."

Theodosia took her fiddle to her chin and began to play Americy's tune, touching the bow lightly to the

strings. The eyes in Stig's face were bent down slightly at the corners, wearily drooped, but his lips smiled at the music. Theodosia remembered at that moment that Lethe had once had a child. "They buried Lethe's baby today," some voice was remembered saying. "Another death on Hill Street." A child epidemic had been sweeping over the town. Remembering the infant she looked at Lethe with a searching gaze, the dead child and Lethe's grief in her mind, wondering at the nature of this grief and searching Lethe's face anew for some remnant of it.

"Skeeter Shoots, he's got a thing like that-there to play on," Stig said, speaking suddenly in a flare of words, half shouting. "Only he plays his'n on his mouth, plays it with his spit." He began to hum aloud and to sing unmusical sounds, his hands crumpled at his lips. "Plays on it with his spit in his mouth," he said. "Goes like this-here."

"What you bring Stig here for?" Lethe said. "Did I tell you to bring Stig here?"

He began to tell of some confused happening which was related to the mouth harp in his mind. A rat had been killed in the corn room, a half-starved rat that had been shut into a tank for many days. He talked, catching at his breath, gleeful over the story, waving his hands. "We kill ol' rat in corn room," he said. "We brain ol' rat one day in corn room."

"What's he want?" Lethe asked.

"He don' want e'er thing," Americy said, speaking gently. "Leave him be."

"There was a rat, ol' rat," Stig began afresh. "Got shut in water-tank. Tin water-tank, not got no water in it. You ought to 'a' seen ol' rat! Skeeter Shoots he says to me, 'Look at that-there rat, God knows, shut inside that-there tank. Been shut up three weeks since that-there rat got shut up since tank was open last. Skeeter Shoots says."

Lethe turned back to the table, her elbows on the board, her knees crossed. Her body was bent slightly forward as if she were deeply fatigued.

"What'd you bring him here for?" she asked.
"What's he here for now?"

"What is it you know about him?" Theodosia asked sharply, turning suddenly on Lethe, unafraid in her sudden surprise.

"I know enough. I ain't been borned so long ago for nothing."

"A ham bone," Stig began to whimper. "Ham-meat is right good now. Ham."

"You can take him on away when you've done whatever you come for."

"We all say, 'Whoopee! come see ol' rat.' So weak in his legs he can't walk on his feet. Crawl on his belly. Slow, go like a snail-bug. See ol' rat go up stable. Ol' rat. 'Take ker, ol' rat!' We all watch ol' rat go towarge corn room. Slow, slow, towarge corn room." He made

slow creeping gestures with his fingers on the floor.

"I know enough. Was I borned last week? For God's sake!"

"You hate me, Lethe," Theodosia said after a little, speaking through Stig's garbled recitative that continued. "You hate me. What makes you hate me? What did I ever do to you?"

"Was I borned last week? Don't you reckon I know your tricks? Is he anybody to me?"

Americy began to play one of her tunes, laboring with the chords and humming softly, half whispering, and Theodosia watched the fingers on the strings or she plucked her own strings to make harmonious chords with the tune. The music set Stig's eyes in a dance and renewed his memory of the scene in the corn room. His voice was lifted to a higher pitch.

"We all says 'Whoopie! Come see ol' rat.' Crawl on his belly. Go a leetle piece, stop, go a leetle piece. Three weeks in that-there tank and ne'er a bite inside him."

"For God's sake!" Lethe said. She turned wearily toward the table again. "Oh, for God's sake!"

"Ol' rat," Stig said. "Rat go crawl, crawl down towarge corn room. We all walk behind ol' rat and see ol' rat go crawl down towarge corn room. Skeeter Shoots says 'Come see ol' rat.' Says, 'Naw, don't kill yet. Watch 'im crawl down towarge corn room.' Take ol' rat, I reckon, hour. I go water Rose and hitch up Beckie. Come back. 'Ain't ol' rat got there yet?'"

"To let Minnie Harter take your man away. For

God's sake! You're easy. To let Min Harter get ahead on you. The lame slut." Lethe spoke with great passion, turning half about and staring at Theodosia, eyeing her form up and down.

"What you know about that?" Theodosia asked. She turned back to Americy's playing again. "What do you know about that?"

"Plays a tune right outen his spit," Stig said.

"Oh, God's pity on us all," Americy said. She was rocking herself forward and back.

"What's God got to do about this?" Theodosia asked. She turned on Americy, her words like an outcry. Americy stopped her rocking and sat stilled, afraid before the rush of the question.

"What's God got to do? I do' know," Americy said. And then she whispered, "Oh, God 'a' pity."

"Where is any God?"

"A ham bone to gnaw on's all I want. My spit wants a ham bone to lick," Stig said.

"Oh, I d'know," Americy said, speaking to both of them. "Oh, I got no ham bone." Her face was bent low and her voice was low.

"Ol' rat go crawl, crawl, so weak he can't go."

Theodosia looked at the small flame in the lamp behind the dull burnt chimney, her eyes on the little apple of light that throbbed unevenly there. She was thinking of the light as a small flower in bloom, and she traced its essence to Americy's face and then to Stig's forehead where it shone against his brow. The

shadows beside Americy's nostrils made hollows in the long, blank brown of her face, her two dark eyes bent over the guitar in a stupid anxiety to accomplish a chord she had known a few days before. There was a step outside on the roadway, and presently steps were moving away from the house. Somebody had been looking in at the window. Theodosia stirred a little in her chair and her own part in the room troubled her, in the house. "What am I here? What to them?" she was asking herself. She sat in the stiff chair, in the middle of the floor, facing Americy, feeling Lethe's hate. "Her hate pushes me back, but it does not push me out at the door," she was thinking. She began to play some melody on the fiddle, a melody which she broke and distorted, rubbing the bow softly over the gut, making a thin, distracted music, unjointed, without logic. Lethe turned away and sat toward the table, and Stig had begun to tell his story again. Lethe's hate did not forbid her, but rather it pricked the air with some fertile pollen and prepared every moment a newer menace, and to each moment the fiddle responded with soft demonic music, ill-flavored, crooked, sinister. She brought her playing to crashing discords, softly played, a disturbance working upward through half-tones, and Lethe turned about, her head and shoulders facing the fiddle, and said:

"To let Min Harter take your man. God's sake. Right afore your own eyes. Would I stand that-there, me? Min lame and you got two good legs yourself."

"You hate me hard, don't you, Lethe," Theodosia said, speaking sharply. She tried to turn back to Americy's song.

"Or let Flo Agnew. Some said it was Flo Agnew got your goat. God's sake! You a tame one." Lethe's words were bitter to her own taste now, turned back upon herself, as if she were defending herself.

"Where's Ross now?" Americy asked, speaking softly, afraid of Lethe's passion. Her tone was slightly knowing, as if she gave a taunt in defense of Theodosia. Softly spoken, "Where's Ross by now?"

"He works now of a night at the brick-yard, works all night at the brick-kiln."

"It was said Ross was sweet on Lou at the lodge supper a Sat'day, sweet as pie on Lou, was said." Americy spoke to herself, in a dream, and she began to rock to and fro again. "That's what was said a Sunday at the church."

"If he spends one quarter on her," Lethe said, laying down her hard oath with slow, careful words, "If he spends one quarter on her or walks in the dark once beside her, I'll . . . I'll cut her body open with a hog knife. One time, and I'll do it, so help me God."

Stig was telling his story, making small tracks with his fingers on the bare floor, his mouth dripping in his eagerness to relate the happenings. Theodosia looked at Lethe continually now and she saw her hate arise to an intense power and she knew, seeing her, the force of hate where it mounted, direct, willing, un-

curbed by self-searching. Looking intently at Lethe she merged for the instant with her and felt the sting of hate where it spread over her own face and her breast.

"That's what was said," Americy whispered, staring at the floor. "Sweet on Ross, Lou was, and him sweet back on her, was said."

"One time, and I'll cut her open with a hog knife. She knows I will. She better know." A cry.

"Crawl, crawl, crawl down stable. Climb step. Can't climb last step. Too steep. Skeeter Shoots, he says, 'I help ol' rat up last step.' Sets ol' rat down on top. 'See?' Skeet says. 'Here's corn room.' We kill ol' rat inside corn room."

"Americy, have you got a soul, a spirit?" Theodosia asked. "Did you inherit one? Did you?"

"I saw the glory o' the Lord one time," Americy said, half singing. "I saw the Lamb o' God. Oh, my Jesus!"

Theodosia arose quickly from her chair and stood by the door, her hand having flung open the door. "Stig, have you got a soul? Inside you somewhere? Inside?" She knew that she was persisting cruelly. She leaned over him where he sat by the frame of the door.

"I got a hungry belly insides me. I got a tape-snake wants a ham bone to gnaw," Stig said. "I mean what I say."

She was leaning over him, looking at him intently,

seeing his large heavy face from above and watching its changing shadows, looking at his dirty brown coat and his frayed breeches that bulged into the light where his knees were raised. He seemed to be chewing at something, his lips working in and out. Her eyes centered to his hands that drifted about over his thighs and cupped together beyond his knees.

"Hold out your hands, Stig," she said, "hold out your hand. Your hand."

His hand, broad in the palm, flexible, sensitive to the boards of the floor, was stretched, palm downward, beyond his foot, or it crept over the floor; it turned upward and moved back and forth before her. The long reach of the thumb and the span of the thumb and the fingers assailed her, and the hand fiddled a moment on the air. Then it crumpled together, bones and muscles flexed, and withdrew to the shadow under his knee. "The fiddle hand," she said, standing straight beside the door now. "You got the fiddle hand, Stig," she whispered. "You got it."

"I got a hungry belly insides me, that's what I got. I already told you-all now. I got a hungry gut."

She ran out the door, making a clatter on the steps, flinging the gate back after her. The lights were lit along the streets and lanes now and people were stirring about. The town seemed of one essence, every detail flattened to the mass, and she walked as if she walked alone, arrogant, stepping upon the closely conglomerated matter of voices, stones, shadows, faces,

acquaintance, history. Singularly marked, standing above the stones on which she stepped, above the earth on which she walked, she came down the street and entered her gate, detached from her own entrance, standing above the click of the latch, above the segments of light that lay as broken rectangles on the gallery floor.

ANTHONY had passed into a delusion, imagining he was in some other place; he talked of a sea which he thought could be seen from the window and he would ask the state of the tide. He called Theodosia by a strange name, Amelia, one she had never heard in the family before.

Theodosia set herself to gather a class of students for stringed instruments and presently she had as large a number as her time allowed, for a passing fancy for this kind of playing was spreading over the town. The house was desolate and poorly warmed. There was little fuel, and Aunt Bet sulked of insufficient supplies for the kitchen. Theodosia brought the children to the parlor and taught them there, wondering at Anthony's myth of Amelia and a sea. Or passing away from his room after he had talked with her in his strange knowledge, she would look with an unyielding scrutiny at herself, at the myth of Anthony, to try to find some last sign of an inevitable substance or kind, perpetually

existent, unchanged, beyond delusion. "I join hands with him, and he is gone," she said.

"Tell Sylvester to put harness on the gray," Anthony would say, or again, "High tide comes the second of the month, Amelia. . . ." If he were from his bed he would sit very quietly, sinking slowly with the fire until he sat crumpled in sleep.

He had departed although he continued some manner of life. He never again called Theodosia by any name but Amelia. She fed him broth from a spoon and thus nourished his continuation while he had already gone into some memory, perpetually keeping there now. "He's gone, he's gone," she said in her thought, "and I join hands with him," and as she tuned some child's instrument or busied herself with the lessons she leaped forward to try to experience entire dissolution, to consummate it for him, to foretell the encounter already well begun, stayed from any outcry by the enveloping confusion and distrust without and within.

His regard for Amelia was constant, tender, dispassionate, and a curiosity to know who this person could have been troubled her and set her to search among all the names she had ever heard spoken in the house. Or she asked her father.

"Who was Amelia in Grandfather's life? When did Grandfather know Amelia?"

"Amelia? Search me. You can't never tell about the old war horse. Lived a long time, he did, and he lived well. What's one skirt more to the old war horse? But

she was a lady nohow. You can set that much down for certain. The old war horse, his taste ran to ladies. No white trash in his loven days. Amelia was a lady." Horace spoke with tenderness now.

"And who was Sylvester then?"

"No tellen. Some nigger, I reckon. I wouldn't say."

"You can't tell. A man lives a long time. Goes through a heap from first to last."

They sat in the dining-room waiting; there were many hours of waiting now. Horace talked incessantly, as if the summary of a life being enacted on the bed in the front room loosed his tongue and brought his own experience to a period, to a momentary full-stop. Or he talked of the old man and he was touched often with grief. Theodosia sat half-drowsed now, for she had slept but little of late. The words came as a continued recitative as Horace talked.

"The old man was a good soldier. Nobody could say any dirt of the old man. Proud of his lineage and rightly so. He loved the fine things of the mind, you might say, and pursued classical learnen. Faithful to his ideal, honest with all men, proud, gentle, tender as a woman. Why, Father was a traveler far and wide. In his youth he spent several years in travel—and a right smart of money too, I reckon. Few men of his

generation were more widely read, more richly informed. I know what I say. In his youth he was an omnivorous reader, optimistic, salubrious, and among his colleagues there was none better fitted to lead and counsel the young. Faithful to his highest conceptions, an inspiration to the youth of his circle, he was intelligent, honest, proud, and as tender as a woman."

He would grow tired and slip into his more negligent mood. "Did I ever tell you about the time the old man put up Leslie Robinson for Governor? He put out, I reckon, five thousand dollars to nominate Les Robinson. It's a pity the old man ever turned his talent to politics, even for so short a time as it took to roll Les Robinson up into a spit-ball and throw him up on the roof of the convention hall. It's all in the count. But Father believed in Les Robinson's genius, wanted to see him win, and he had some notion to get something for himself out of it, I reckon. It's no use now to waste breath on old measures. All the west counties got in line, and then somebody got all the mountains in a handful. It was a frame-up on Les. The owls of iniquity will howl. No use to go into it now. Money melts in politics like sugar in hot water. Nobody knows where't goes. The most hearty desire to render succor, service, unselfish devotion to the common cause of myself and my country. I promise, if elected, to emulate the great heroes of our great commonwealth in word and act, to uphold the constitutions

of the state and of the nation, to honor the law and the right, and to protect the home as the sanctuary of mankind."

He was personally reminiscent now, his feet on a high hassock. "You remember, don't you, Theodosia, the time I ran for the state senate? . . . It's queer how it is, but your own brat that you begot yourself grows up and looks you full in the face and asks you with a sharp shoulder-blade, 'What made you ever do that durned fool thing for?' I've known you, Theodosia, ever since you were no bigger than my two hands, and earlier. Ronnie Robinson says, 'Le's make this one a toast,' and then Mike O'Connor says, 'We'll drink to the health of the unborn.' The time I acted Santy Claus in the church. I never told in your hearen about that, did I, Dosia?"

"Folks there in the church thought here's a good time to get Horace interested in church work, I reckon. Charlotte played the organ there part of the time. I recollect they asked me to act Santy Claus. 'Who ever saw a Santy Claus six foot and over?' I says, but they'd got their heads set to't. Mike O'Connor says, 'God's sake, Horace!' when he heard I was to be the Santy Claus. Christmas Eve at night, it was to be. Rosie Granger made the costume for me to wear, a red coat, boots with fur sewed on the top. A white beard all over my mouth. 'I drink to the health of the unborn,' Mike O'Connor says."

She saw that he was repaying her for being a

shoulder-blade to his pride. "I drink to the health of the unborn," he repeated the saying. He was repaying her for all her scorn of him. "Tom Molloy says, 'God's sake, he won't stay sober.' I recollect after I got on my costume we all sat down in Tom Molloy's room to wait till the church was ready, all the singen down and the tableau over, up the street from the church, in the old hotel. Miss Esther What's-her-name down-stairs promised to call me when it was my time to go on, and we all sat down to a little cards, Tom Molloy, Mike O'Connor, and Ronnie Robinson, uncle to Ruth, he was. Sat down to a few hands of poker. Ronnie poured out the spirits and he poured big measures, and I sat there all dolled up for Santy Claus. 'Christmas comes but once a year,' Ronnie said, and then Mike stood up and, solemnly, he meant every word of it too, says, 'We'll drink to the health of the unborn.' Charlotte was not goen out then. She was, you might say, in a delicate condition, and God's sake! It was you yourself, Theodosia, that was curled up inside her asleep like a little kitten. God's sake! Mike stood up, solemnly, too, meant every word he said, and out comes, 'We'll drink to the health of the unborn.' Don't you ever forget that about Mike. Then Ronnie in his turn, 'I drink to the health of the unbegotten.' I swear to God he did. After we'd drunk to the health of the unbegotten twice or three times Tom was so drunk he was beside himself and he says, 'It'll never do. It'll never do on earth. He can't stand up on his feet, let

alone walk around a Christmas tree and hand out pretties,' and we all sat down again to a little cards to steady our nerves.

"Tinkle, tinkle, merry bells. I remember the night as well, cold outside, the fire big in the grate, fireworks up the street where the boys were out, good cheer, good friends, and a world new-born. I recall I held two queens and was drawen for a third when up calls Miss Esther and says it's time to go over, says they're on the last piece, she can tell by the singen, and says they've already begun to light the candles on the tree. Then Tom says, 'He can't do it. He's drunk. God's sake, there'll be a holy show if we let him get loose,' and I called down to tell 'em to wait till I draw another queen, to keep the song on foot till I draw one time more. Well, we went over, and Ronnie laughed so hard he said he was in a paroxysm, and Mike says, 'A what?' Mike always was a good friend of mine. I recollect Tom was all in a tremble and he says, 'It'll be a holy show.' Thought I couldn't do it."

A pity for him came into her mind and a hatred, cruel and bitter, for these men, his friends, some of them dead or gone somewhere. She remembered them now; they were scattered away from the town, or some of them were dead. She pushed her hair back from her forehead and sank into the hollows of the chair, her face turned toward him and away from the fire. She pitied him for a moment before he spoke again, but when he spoke her pity was lost, dispelled. "I handed

out these little gauze sacks with candy shown through to fifty chaps. 'I drink to the health of the unborn,' Mike says. Old Mike. I handed out these little gauze sacks and I handed a good precept along with each one. I made a first-rate Santy Claus. 'I drink to the health of the unbegotten,' Ronnie says, over at the hotel before we set out for the church."

She could see him as she sat. He ran his fingers through his hair, full of the pride of memory. He had forgotten her then. His blond hair stood over his head, ready always for his fingers when they responded to his pride, and she pitied again, seeing the bare spots above his temples. His great body was untouched by fatigue, was full of vitality. He could talk all night, she thought. He was speaking further, half slyly, making an end each instant and renewing himself.

"There's more I could tell if I was of a mind to, but I won't. After it was over we decided to take a walk in the cold to sort of clear up our heads. We took a walk after it was over, a long walk, took a walk. . . ." His voice seemed delayed, the words slowly pushed apart to let clearer pictures stand between.

She was waiting on a street that was thronged with people, all of them hushed to await some event that gathered itself together and approached far up the street. "The street-parade," a voice said. There was a wide promenade left for the procession which was coming far up the way, all the people standing back and all

very still. The procession was near at hand then, was passing by. It was made up of women, long strange creatures, not old but haggard, spent, thin, labored. Their long lank garments hung to their ankles, but their meager thin forms could be seen through the dejected attire they wore. They walked in an irregular procession, more than a hundred although they were uncounted. It was a terror to see them.

They converged toward something, focused toward some following object or person although their faces were set forward and they marched on. Their steps plodded on the pavement. They centered back in a fan-shape of interest toward some other, some focus. Then there was a great blare of sudden music and, the women being finished, the object was at hand. It was the figure of a man, made of human flesh. He stood at ease on a dais or float and moved forward with the blare of music without effort. The women were gone now, their backs visible as they walked down the way of the procession, but the man was at hand in the midst of a great burst of horn music. He was more than life-size, was of heroic proportions, moving easily along on the float as if he were propelled by some unseen force engendered by the multitude of women. He was one, one man, heroic in size, bursting with strength and life, made of flesh like a man. He stood erect, his limbs apart, in a lewd pose. He was naked. On his body were marks then; on his chest they began, as small warts sprinkled over his breast, but lower,

on his upper abdomen, they were larger and were shaped like small teats. They became larger as they descended over his abdomen and became more alive, each one more living than the last. They were rigid with life and were pointed forward toward the women.

Her own self stood at her elbow. She turned quickly about, toward her self, and she knew a deep wish, an ardent prayer that her self had not seen this last. Her self had not seen, was watching the women as they were going far down the street. The great fanfare of horns became suddenly remote and the float had passed by. Her self had not seen it. She was glad with a great thankful prayer. She found then, suddenly, that she had waked from sleep, that she was in the room with Horace, who was still speaking. His voice gathered itself back, closing the wide opening that had stood between his words. "*Silent Night* and one thing and another," the words said, gathering together into sense. "It was Mike proposed to take a walk, and we sang a long while out by the Johntown forks of the road."

Her dream rolled back before her conscious eyes, vivid in memory now. The terrible drama of it stood it before her eyes as a passing design. Her picturing mind went back to it, detail by detail, fascinated and frightened. She put it together and took it apart, dwelling on each terrible picture, and saw the dreary women in procession, laboring forward, and then the man infinitely furnished, and then herself guarding her self from the sight. She went back to the beginning and

stated it anew, bringing the pageant into play slowly. The women marched in their long drab garments, walking without music, laboring forward. The man then, and the blare of horns.

She walked to the opened door and looked at Anthony where he lay stretched out to die, covered as she had covered him. He was sleeping profoundly, his breath continuing. The evening was early as yet; later she would look for others to come, Frank and a friend or two of Horace's. She went back to her seat by the fire, and Horace was still speaking.

"Then I recollect we set-to to finish up the job Mike proposed for us, to walk down every street and alley in town. 'We'll slight not one,' Mike said. 'No alley or by-way so humble it would be said we wouldn't walk on it,' Mike said. That's how I ever got in the alley back of the jail, I reckon. 'I drink to the health of the unborn,' Mike said, up in Tom's room before we went over to the Christmas tree, and had you in mind, you understand. Mike was always a good friend of mine. I've been richly endowed with friendship all my life, good friends as any you'll ever see any man have. . . . That my father should 'a' come you might say to poverty in his old age, to actual poverty. Those sneaken, low-down, three-times-damned hounds that got his property. I'll do something about it yet. Put up Les Robinson for governor and all the low-down sharks in the state got the pickens of his purse. They're not done with me yet, not by a jugful. That my father,

Anthony Bell, should . . . The old man adored you, always from the start. I could see it, you no bigger than two years old. Believed in you. 'She's got a rare musical talent,' he said. Used to get warmed up over it, you no bigger than that high. What'll become of us now, we two the only ones left? We'll have to console each other, get near together. The world, it'll be a lonesome place for me and you without the old man."

Theodosia was distraught when he began to weep. She walked to the inner door again, but when she returned his head was in his hands, his body bowed forward. Retelling all that he had said of Anthony he cried aloud, "A fine old man. I'll be a bereft man now," turning his mind toward self-pity. "Come to your father's arms, Dosia. My heart, it's broken. Come kiss your poor old father."

She kept in her place. "I'll stay where I am," she said.

She had moved to a chair toward the table, toward her grandfather's door, and sat erect. The large heavy sideboard reached beyond her, too near, as if she were crowded into its shadow, as if she were something living that was being expelled from the dark, dead mass of the furniture, pushed outward into a quivering point of pain. She stared at the dim pattern in the carpet, or she moved and stood before the sideboard, her arms folded together. Her tears were gone now and she gathered herself together in the act of folding her arms. Expelled from the entire room, from all the his-

tory of the place, she turned about without guidance and stood near the wall.

"You poor child. Come to my arms," he said, coming near to her.

"Your hands off me. I'll stay where I am." She felt herself to be diminished to a point of denial, concentrated to negation, and his grief continued.

"Over your grandfather's dead body, around his deathbed, you wouldn't kiss your own father. She's hard, a hard girl. . . ."

His tears dwindled to a close, lingering while she, feeling a summons, walked toward the inner door. She stood beside Anthony's bed listening to his long, slow breathing, each breath fixed into a space of quiet. She opened the window to give him fresh cold air for his labored inhalations. One or two came, friends of Horace, and later Frank came. Theodosia sat by the bed alone, but now and then one of the men from the parlor would come to stay with her for a little. At midnight the night-lamp which Anthony liked to have near at hand burned out and she called Siver to carry it away and renew the oil. When he returned with it rubbed clean and restored, he set it on the table and stood beside the bed, charmed by the enactment there, and presently it appeared that Anthony would not breathe again, that one of the slowly breathed sobs that had quietly shaken his body had been his last breath. They, Theodosia and Siver, stood beside the bed, she making her farewell of the beloved cadaver.

Siver found two silver pieces from his pocket and held them in his hand, uncertainly, or he showed them to her, and they seemed for the moment appropriate, as if they gave some sign or made some charm. Then Siver made as if he would lay them across Anthony's eyelids and she consented. When he had done this she adjusted the coins with her own hands, and thus they closed his eyes. Then she called the men from the parlor.

AFTER the funeral Horace went to Paducah to attend court. Mr. Reed called on Theodosia, his blank kindly face looking at her from across the parlor while she settled to her chair. He seemed weary of his mission before he had begun, knowing the end from the beginning. Anthony had made a will seven years earlier making her his sole heir. The formality of unfolding papers and citing memoranda was scarcely necessary, for there was nothing left. He might at any moment have forgotten to proceed, to have summed all with a sigh.

He told her how she might stay certain creditors and hold the house for a short time. "Until you can look about you a little," he said. He had taken his hat from the table and had placed the memoranda on the piano. She might rent a part of the house, retaining a part of it for herself, he suggested. "Until you get used

to things and can look about you a little." She had already floated far from the hour and the interview in her apathy, in the numbness following the acceptance of the disclosures. He would give her any advice he could, he said; she might always apply to him. Apply for what? she wondered, and she closed the house door, looking intently at the door-frame, at the latch, at the baseboard and the floor, seeing them for the first time, seeing them as her possessions.

Horace did not return from Paducah. Time passed. He wrote once hurriedly asking her to send his clothing, or again, much later, he expressed affection and said that he had entered a law firm. In his final letter he said, "My practice needs new life and this city offers a splendid field. I shall start life anew. I shall grow younger every day in this new field. The broad river spreads out before me as I pen these lines."

She walked through the house day after day, her house, experiencing ownership, making certain her knowledge of the place through which she had moved since first she could remember. She saw the stairway intently each time she mounted it, and saw the cabinets where the Indian hatchets and flints lay. She owned the house with a deep passion, possessed it, brick laid on brick in the chimney, the sagging floor of the upper gallery, the upper chambers. She had rented a part of it to a small family, retaining the parlor and the chamber above, and she had her meals at the renters' table.

Frank looked at her complacently now across the space of the parlor. She saw the deeply subordinated admiration in his eyes which had their advice from his life design. He would sit at ease in his chair beside the lamp, Albert's place, and listen to her playing, more at ease now that Albert and Conway were gone. His large, rugged, unbalanced face induced a thought of solid strength, of simplicity. "You could work him out by a formula," she thought, as she saw him appropriate her music to his hour of relaxation. He had an office in the court square of the town and his talk was of wills, deeds, farms, contracts, or foreclosures, unless he remembered to quote from his favorite poets. He remembered the poets often. As a formula he sat now, out before the walls of the parlor, detached from her determination to keep her house, her inheritance.

The house was lost, but she was determined to regain it. It was hers by the deeply imbedded elements of memory, hers by all the fragrant, richly toned ideas that had grown with her own growth. She looked now at her first memory of the earth and saw in it its enhanced qualities as they had come to her first-seeing. She knew that she had been born at the farm, Linden Hill, but that she had been brought to the town house a few months after her birth, when Linden Hill had passed to other hands. She saw, as if it were a super-drama where time and event are enlarged, herself at play as a little child at the foot of the large rough stone chimney in the east wall, and she knew the soil there

intimately with her eyes and with her fingertips, for in the drama she had dug into it with a small spade and had shaped it with her hands. A few herbs such as sorrel and dwarf mint grew there, and a little beyond, away from the damp of the wall, were the first clover blossoms. She saw her hand prodding into the earth to find out its way, her head bent low to see and to smell the crumpled soil. Her mind was fixed now to regain the visible sign of the old play, to keep the trail that led back to her first-knowledge.

She saw how the great trunk of the elm tree came out of the earth, deeply wrinkled and gray or black, as the light fell. Among the floating festoons of leaves overhead, a sharp sudden cry, remembered, so real and vivid as to be cruelly felt, had struck her with a quick and joyous pleasure which was like a recognition—and she had heard her first bird-song. “At these points I am attached to the earth,” she thought, looking at her moving hands, her feet, her memories, at the sorrel and ivy of memory. Aunt Bet had gone to another place without regret or outcry, and Siver was gone. She taught her class with fervor. “I perceive the earth, myself imbedded into it, attached to it at all points,” she thought, “sinking at each moment into it.”

It was spring then, the beginning, a new beginning, she reflected. Infinities of springs were crouched back un-

der the earth waiting to come out in their turns, a spring and then another, flowering momentarily, annually. "Who am I that I should know?" she asked. She walked out the Johntown pike in the mildness of sunset, the hills and the pastures faintly tinged with the first green, a mere wash of delicate light over the top of the pasture, and the color went with the setting of the sun. It is the beginning of the beginning, she reflected anew, the first of the first, the before that stands before itself, the quiver of a closed eyelid. The roads were drained now of their winter mud and slop. A stillness was settled over the creek where the frogs would cry later when the nights were warm. The thing would give birth to itself out of itself, the color of the picture would grow out of the picture, dawning up from within the thing itself. The streets of the town, when she had returned to them, had no sign of that which she had seen on the pastures in the light of sunset, but they had their own token. It was Sunday night, the night after the festival at the hall in Hill Street.

She could feel the tension of the street as it was left from the passion of the night before, as it centered now in the church, in small groups that gathered in doorways or moved swiftly by. There was little gayety left. The leavings of the night before were summed up now in unfinished and unpeased emotions. These were the first mild February nights when a soft balm sifted in from the south. The dim lights began to ap-

pear behind the stained windows of the church entry. She pushed open Lethe's door, without knocking, and went quietly inside. Stig was there with them in the gloom. He was sitting on the bed beside Americy, and in a moment Theodosia saw that Americy was quite drunk, that she laughed and wept in turn, tears on her face.

"Where's the light?" Theodosia asked. "Why not have the lamp?"

She lit a match and made a light in the small lamp on the shelf. Then she saw that Lethe was sitting beside the table that stood near the fireplace. On the table there was a small bit of food, untasted, but this had been swept back toward the farther edge of the board. Before Lethe's hand lay a knife. It was sharpened to a keen edge and the point was well tapered. It was such a knife as was used to cut leather, to mend harness, and she knew that Stig had brought it to the cabin.

"What knife is that?" she asked.

"A good knife. A right good blade," Stig said.

Americy was dressed in her best garments, a silk dress and a scarf brilliantly dyed. Her stockings were torn, the color faded and spotted with abuse, and her low shoes were defiled. Her clothing had not been changed since the day before and her hair had not been set in order since she had slept last.

"I wanted a drink," Stig said, "but nobody wouldn't give me none. Stingy."

Stig was less ragged than he had formerly been, and Theodosia thought that Americy had probably given him the necktie he wore. He munched at something which he carried in his coat pocket, nuts or hard candy, and his hand would go to his pocket from time to time.

"You know Lou Trainer? Did you ever see Lou Trainer anywheres?" Lethe asked, and she turned toward Theodosia slightly, asking her.

"I know Lou. A dark girl. Thin. Walks fast. Yes. I saw her since dark."

"Where'd you see Lou Trainer since dark?"

"Just now. Out the Johntown pike a little piece."

A cry like a wail came from Lethe's mouth and was mingled with her words which were at first undistinguished. "Out that way. Let me get a hold on her throat. I'll strangle her breath outen her body."

Americy had begun to sing, or to hum unevenly, some song that was used in the church. As she sang she rocked herself back and forth. Her tune ran with a long slow measure and she intoned the words as if she thought of an organ accompaniment. The song,

Comen home, comen home,
Lord, I'm comen home.
Open wide thine arms, Oh, God,
Lord, I'm comen home.

Each word was slowly pronounced and widely slurred, as if Americy heard a great throng singing. Lethe arose and walked twice up and down the chamber, but she

came back to her seat before the table, and presently she broke into another outcry which put a swift stop upon Americy's song.

"I said if he spends one quarter on Lou, or if he walks with her one time in the dark, I'd cut her clean open with this-here knife. I'll knife her, and Ross he knows I will."

Stig laughed a great burst of ill-balanced laughter and began to cry out, "She's done it, she's done it. Afore now. A whole lot. God's sake. Lou Trainer. God knows. I want be there when you-all cuts her guts out. See old Lou Trainer's insides drip out."

Lethe's words were set widely apart, dispersed by hate. She pushed the knife back with a careless unseeing gesture, or she rested her hands on the edge of the table, leaning hard upon her palms. "I said I would and I will," she continued to say, or she made her oath. Her words were set against Stig's sudden laughter and Americy's singing or weeping, or from time to time there would be a space of quiet when no one spoke.

"There's singen in the church. I got to go. Where's my hat. I got to go," Americy said. She got up from the bed and walked around the room, but she forgot the hat when it did not come to hand and settled again to the bed, and presently she sang, as before intoning the words slowly.

I wandered far away from God,
Lord, I'm comen home.

The paths of sin no more I'll trod,
Lord, I'm comen home . . .

"Oh, for God's sake let me get my hands once ahold onto her throat. Let me get my hand in her face. I'll stab to kill. I'll learn her what I mean."

"There's singen in the church. Let all you-all sing now. Let all you sing. All together. Stand and sing the song of the invitation. I see the new Jerusalem and the glory of the Lord. Come sinner, Halleluiah!"

"One time, I said, one time. If she goes a night with him once. I'll get my hand aholte on her. . . ."

"One time?" Stig said, and he broke into a burst of laughter. "One time. Oh, God's sake! Skeeter Shoots says to me, he says, 'Ross, now,' he says. 'Ain't Ross he Lethe's man? God's sake! Thought Ross,' Skeeter Shoots says, 'thought Ross were Lethe's man. Thought Ross took up along with Lethe a long while ago,' Skeet Shoots says."

Americy looked at Stig amorously and began to kiss his face, her own face wet with tears. Or she would stop in her caressing and, with hands on his shoulders, she would sing again, always the same tune. Theodosia had been sitting near the middle of the floor in the chair she had always used when she had been there before. It was drawn near to Lethe's chair now, and thus she sat, but presently she arose and walked to the door or she returned to stand a moment over Lethe. In Lethe hate was apotheosized, a hungry god, rav-

enous, beside an altar waiting for food. Lethe's breath was fluted and broken, timed to the beating of her heart, marked by regular sobs that were softly voiced now and then. Her eyes were beyond seeing, turned glassy with their own inner sight. She was unaware of the presence of Stig and Americy, and after her first questioning of Theodosia she had seemed shut from any recognition of her. Theodosia pushed her chair near the table and bent one knee into it, standing uncertainly, looking about at the dim walls, at Americy's weeping. She stood over Lethe, leaning slightly forward, and her breath became hard, fluted with the beating of her own heart where anger began to arise and was timed to Lethe's panting breath.

"I'll kill. I'll stab her afore daylight," Lethe said with her shaking breath.

"Lou? What for? Lou?" Theodosia asked.

"Oh, I'll kill. I said kill."

"Ross," Theodosia said. "Didn't he look at Lou? Didn't he want Lou? What call have you got to let Ross go? Where's Ross?"

"Lou. My hand on her heart. I'll tear her guts outen her side."

Theodosia walked to the door and looked out into the dark, but she returned again and stood as she had stood before. Her breast and her throat were shaking in a sobbing rush of ineffectual hate, her teeth chattering when she ceased to speak. She could hear Stig's

taunting laughter that came in strange, high-pitched bursts of feminine tone as he recounted the surmises of his friends and the opinions of the hands at the stable.

“Ross,” she said.

“Lou. I’ll stab to the heart of her. I’m not afeared. I’ll stab fitten to kill.”

“Did Ross bring Lou to see you? Did he ever? You see how it is with me. Did he?”

“Oh, I’ll kill. Ross he knows I’m no tame woman. He knows.”

“‘I brought her here so’s you’d see for your own self,’ he says. ‘The easiest way. No fuss.’”

“Oh, I’ll kill. Afore day I will.”

“He said ‘You see how it is with me, Dosia. I brought her here.’ It’s all the same. He brought her in the door of the hall, before all the people, came inside the door with her, his hand ahold of her arm, before your eyes, came inside the hall of the festival.”

“Oh, I can’t bear not to. I’ll kill, kill . . .”

“‘I brought her here so’s you’d see for your own self.’ . . . Then he bought her a treat at the counter where the things to eat were. His hand on her arm and on her shoulder. His hand on her back.”

“Kill, I will. I couldn’t bear not to.”

Theodosia felt her body slipping into the chair and leaning nearer. She wanted justice. She leaned close to Lethe’s body, her hands on the edge of the table be-

side Lethe's hands. She was shut into a complete stillness and she was mingled with Lethe's anger and hate.

"Ross," she said.

"Lou. I'll rip her open. I'll stab inside."

"Did Ross bring Lou to see you? 'You see how it is with me,' he said. Did he ever?"

"Oh, I'll kill her. She knows. She ought to know."

"I brought her here so's you'd see for yourself," he said."

"Oh, I'll kill. Afore day, I will."

"She's out at the gate to wait for me. I brought her here so's you'd see. For yourself."

"Oh, God, I aim to kill. He knows I mean what I say."

"Kill Ross. Who's he to go free?"

"Lou. She's already dead now."

"He said, 'You see how it is with me. . . .' He brought her in the hall of the festival. He came inside the door with her."

"Oh, I can't bear not. . . ."

"I brought her here so's you'd see for your own self?"

Suddenly Lethe turned upon her and threw her arms about her neck, holding her in a deep and tender embrace for a long instant, a powerful maternal caress. Theodosia could feel the impact of the stiffened muscles when, after relaxation, they leaped to renewed force, and she could hear the deep sob of hate where it arose and shook Lethe's bosom with a force that beat with

pain upon her own more slender body. When Lethe turned away toward the table again she sat leaning upon it as before. She seemed to have sunk into a dream.

People were passing, voices talking softly, steps falling unevenly on the rough road. Americy had fallen into a state of quiet weeping, her arms about Stig's shoulders. Then Lethe lifted her head suddenly as if she were hearing something from without. Her hand leaped to the knife-handle with such suddenness and such force that Theodosia's hand was swept off the board. Then Lethe had sprung from her place and had rushed out at the door. Theodosia sat bowed over the table, staring at the place where Lethe's hand had been, or her eyes would dart about over the board, looking for the knife, expecting to see the knife where it had lain. A remote footstep went by in the street or another paused at the gate, or drifted on. She accepted these as a part of the night outside.

After a long while she moved in her seat, her body pained with its long, stiff pose, and after she had stared at her own hands and had stretched them on the top of the table and turned them about, searching for some sign or recognition, she arose and stood beside Lethe's chair where it had been pushed roughly back and overturned. It was a token of Lethe's going. Lethe was gone. The knife was gone. She walked to the door and looked out, up and down the quiet street, but the church was dark now and the houses were shut and

quiet. Once she called "Lethe!" from the doorway, but there was no answer and she heard no footfalls anywhere in the dark.

When she came back to the room again Americy was caressing Stig with a deeply amorous intent and he had ceased to cry out his taunts after Lethe's going. He was laughing in a hideous way, returning Americy's caresses. She stopped before them, standing before the bed where they sat.

"Come on now, Stig, and go with me. It's time to go now," she said.

"Me, I don't aim to go," he said. "I don't live in stable no more."

"Come on, Stig. It's time to go now."

"I live along with Americy." He laughed uncertainly, unable to talk farther.

"Americy," she said. "Don't you know what Stig is? Stig's your brother. Wake up and know what I say. Your brother."

"I'm your sister," Americy mumbled as if she were asleep. "I always knowed I was your sister."

"And Stig's our brother. Our brother."

Their replies were not articulated. Stig's response became a low, monstrous laughter, falling rhythmically, like the bleat of some great animal, pleading laughter, crying to be appeased. Americy had fallen into a semi-sleep. Theodosia stood over them, trying to awaken Americy, calling to her, drawing at her arm. But

Americy clung the closer to Stig and Theodosia came swiftly away.

IT was late when she reached her room, near midnight. She sat on the edge of her bed staring at the wall, looking with horror at what she had left in Lethe's cabin. Lethe had gone somewhere in the dark with the knife in her strong hand, and she would plunge the knife into hated flesh. Her hand would feel the dull resistance of human bone and it would rain up and down, stabbing deeper with each blow, letting out the blood, tearing through flesh until her hate had eased itself. She looked at the two, Lethe and Americy, and their two ways met and became one horror that dazed her mind and drowsed her eyes so that, moving back from it, she sank quickly into a deep sleep. She lay in the heart of evil and slept all the night, lying as if she had been drugged, uncovered to the cool air that came in at the open windows. She lay on the outside of the bed, as she had first fallen, deeply shut into sleep, and the chill damp air that came with a dense fog at dawn did not appraise her of anything, nor did the ringing of the morning angelus.

Late in the morning she stirred slightly and was aware of herself as the residue of disaster, the leavings of tragedy, the nothing of the evil hereafter. A faint

cry for pity hushed itself on her lips. Then she began to chill in the cold and she slowly aroused herself to sit on the side of the bed. Her body was shaking in curious rhythms that built upward toward a climax and subsided only to arise again, a compound rhythm of quivering flesh. She reached for a warm dressing-gown and covered herself in the bed, but the chill persisted. Later the woman who had rented the house came bringing some food.

"I thought you might be sick," she said. "I do believe you got a chill."

She set the tray she had brought on the table and began to build a fire in the grate, talking meanwhile about her morning work, suggesting remedies for the cold she said Theodosia had caught. There had been a tragedy in the town during the night, she said. A man had been killed—Ross. She asked Theodosia if she knew a black man named Ross. He had been killed the night before. When she had told this news Theodosia cried out that she had killed him, and the woman was frightened as she came away from the fireplace and stood over the bed.

"You must be real sick," she said. "Is your throat sore maybe? What hurts you?"

"Oh, I killed him," Theodosia cried out again. She could feel the strange rhythms tearing her body in orderly stabs of pain. "I stabbed his throat with a harness knife. I cut his throat."

"You never did no such thing. You're clean out of your head. I better send for Dr. Muir."

"I stabbed his throat with a harness knife."

"How do you know it was a harness knife? How comes it you know so much about it?"

"I did it," Theodosia said. She sank back to the bed then.

"It's curious you know how it happened. But it was a black woman, Lethe, stabbed him. Everybody knows it."

"Lethe stabbed Lou, but I killed Ross. I cut his throat open."

"Lethe tells how it happened. She's in jail now. She's confessed and there's no question about who did it. She did it. She went after Lou, seems like, but when Ross defended Lou she killed him. Out at the brick-yard it happened, about midnight they say. Lethe's in jail now and she'll maybe go to prison for ten years or so. Ross was her husband, but he went off after Lou, and so the court will likely give her a light sentence, they say. Ten years or fifteen, but that's not light, goodness knows. Anyway she won't hang, or is not likely, they say."

"I did it," Theodosia cried out again, sitting up in bed again. "I'll go to prison ten years, fifteen maybe. Hang maybe. I don't want to be hung. But I did it. . . ."

The strength of the chill multiplied and the

rhythms flowed in a strange complexity, short rhythms fitted into the long flow of the heavier beat. Later the fever came and she was still again.

A MONTH later Theodosia sat for a little while each day in the sunshine on the south side of her room. Dr. Muir had come every day to listen to her breathing through a stethoscope. She had let life bring her back to life if it would, lending little aid herself to the return. Her fiddle had been shut securely into its case.

She would have to rest for a long while, Dr. Muir said, and she would have to live in the country and have much rich food. She was shut into some remote death although breath came and went in her throat. The doctor's suggestions became a law that moved over her, having its way without protest. Abundant food regularly taken, more than was desired—it came to her bed. Presently it would be owed for, but now it was merely there, to be eaten, the last caloric measure. She would not be playing the fiddle, Dr. Muir said, not for several months anyhow. Playing would put too much strain on the arms and chest. The town had its spring season, the birds in the trees. Her windows were always opened wide.

"You had better go to your Aunt Doe's, in the country," Dr. Muir said. "A long rest, fresh air, food. That's all you need."

She had better sell the house and let the mortgages be paid, the doctor said; she had better close her life there in the town. She was unable to continue her teaching. He went into the facts about her inheritance and weighed each in her presence, asking questions, making judgments. She had better sell all, he advised, and turn away the creditors, had better relieve herself of all worry. She had better go. In the heart of this remote death into which she had passed she stirred a little, remembering the great sweep of rolling land as it was to be seen from the upper windows at the farm.

Some light sorrel horses had stood by a fence, and the queen-anne's-lace-handkerchief was spreading white beyond the creek path. "Oh, it's a good morning. I someways like a day just like this," the words arose and flowed back into the mingled picture—a path along a cornfield where sweet hot weeds gave out their savors in the sunshine of noon, the man in the low field plowing all day, the horse and the plow and the figure of the dark creature that bent over the plow-handles making an even pattern of dark lines that crept slowly over the earth and continued all day, pleasant to see and of no effort to herself. The high cackle and clatter of the feeding times soon after dawn when the poultry and the geese and the guinea-fowls sang their food cries through the baaing of the calves and the low grunting of the swine, and she had turned on her pillow to sleep again, lulled by the sweet blended clatter. The hill field sometimes plowed but mainly left in pasture grass.

Out the upper window the land had rolled away a hundred miles, two hundred, never to be measured, beyond hills and fields, insufficient even where the last frail tree stood on the most removed hilltop, beyond two farms.

She would go. Frank came to sit with her frequently or he brought passages to read, tribute to her convalescing hours. "Good old Frank," her tears surprised her in saying once when his departure clicked the latch of the gate.

A dealer in old furniture came from Lester and bargained for the pieces. A crier sold the house from the gallery steps one noisy court day in May. The archaic hatchets and flints were dispersed, culled over by a collector from Louisville, some of them rejected and thrown into a large basket. Theodosia saved for herself Anthony's books, and she had them packed into boxes to be hauled to the farm. Dr. Muir had been to call upon her aunt and to ask hospitality for the invalid. All was arranged. She would go. The way was sunny and long on the day of the journey, the road heavy to go, distorted with shadows, the hedges standing back far and the woods vistas spacious to the point of giving pain. As if bandage had been removed from a recent hurt or fracture, the confines of the town taken away, she spread painfully out through the hills and fields, through the ways to go. She closed her eyes and the car slipped lightly, too lightly, among the road windings.

FIVE

DOE SINGLETON said that she might choose any room above-stairs that pleased her, and she chose the one in which she and Annie had stayed, the west room. The high bed leaped at her unpleasantly and receded suddenly into diminished perceptions as she spread the sheets and quilts over it to prepare it for occupation. It funneled down suddenly into a very small object, a familiar pattern, a bed, when she focused her attention upon it, but left uncentered it bulged suddenly to unapprehended proportions, divided, proportion at war with proportion and quality. She opened the windows to the south sun and lay in the bed.

There was no one in the house but the aunt, whose muffled, uncertain noises fell after undetermined intervals, and herself, who, lying in the bed, was subtracted from the content of the walls, length, breadth, and thickness therein contained, and extended as continuing in a running movement through history, past and future. The second day she noticed the leaves of the linden tree and how each one carried two small buds or pods held to the leaf by a slender green wire. At regular intervals the voice of her aunt called from below.

“It’s ready now. You can come.”

Below-stairs there would be food on a small table in a back room, her aunt's bedroom. The bed stood pompously against the wall opposite the great fireplace, and the dogs came and went or rested before the open fire, lying down stiffly or arising. There was no servant and the dining-room across the hall was mouldy and dark. The food was always on the table when she came down the stairs, bread and meat and milk. There was coffee in a silver coffeepot.

"I don't myself keep any cows now," Miss Doe said. "I got the milk for you from the tenant man on the place."

"Don't you keep any cows any more?"

"No use, just for me, me not very partial to milk in my diet. I eat mostly the same all the time, but you say the doctor said milk for you and I got Bland to fetch up some."

"That was very kind of you, Aunt Doe."

As she lay again in the bed the avenue ran down to the stone wall and turned sweetly to the gate, which was perpetually white. Slowly in mind she walked down the avenue, step by step, stopping to look at each minute occurrence, as the wild fern by the side of the drive, the small gray imagined birds that flocked over the stems of the low pasture weeds and took imagined flight at her step. Her foot twitched lightly under the quilts. When the birds had flown she passed on, going slowly, undetermined whether the way should slope downward or extend outward, shaping it to her will.

She would step slowly to make the walk last the longer. The clover at the side of the path was white and rank, and the grass and weeds of the pasture ready for cutting. The path she went ran along the side of the drive although from the window she could see that there was no path there now, for none ever walked that way. There were wagon prints on the drive, however, marks of tires, and she shuffled her toe in the faintly marked rut and wondered what habitual coming had made it. Each day she prepared the walk, clinging to it with fervor, returning to it as to a consolation. After five days no wheels had sounded on the stone and gravel of the way.

The great hounds would come to her room each day, now one and again another, and they would sniff at the bed or turn about lazily on the carpet. She would call the names until some flicker of recognition would denote that the beast had been rightly called—Roscoe, Nomie, Tim, Speed, Old Mam, Tilly, True. There were some younger dogs, unnamed and unbroken, but these came little to the house. She would hear them running on the hills and hunting their prey. She clung to the daily walk to the gate and back and built the path minutely for comfort, gathering herself out of a running slant of historic actuality to the more comforting actuality of the path beside the drive where the ruts of some never-heard wagon wheels threaded constantly down to the highway. One day it was the shade of the elms that was intensely realized, or another the

sounds of the beetles and crickets, until, being minutely sensed, the path brought her to the white flowers, queen-anne's-lace-handkerchief, clustered in tall masses before the stone wall. The old dogs walked up and down the stairs, sniffing at her bed. True brought her stiff old limbs laboriously up the hall and turned about on the carpet to lie down at the foot of her bed. Below on the hearth in Doe Singleton's room some great pones of cornbread were perpetually cooking on rough old iron pans, bread for the old dogs.

ONE morning after the journey below had been accomplished, while she lay resting from the difficult ascent of the stairs, a low purr of muffled noises flowed through the hallways, and the front door was opened and closed. Then a white cloth was hung on the vine by the door and the steps receded and became the uncertain tread of her aunt on the pavement beside the house wall. The hour was long and sunny, undefined, mingled now with some anticipated event which pointed to the white cloth that hung by the pillar. Later a yellow truck came up under the elms, fitting its wheels to the ruts, and the words, **PERKINS' LINIMENTS**, grew, boldly defined, on the yellow sides of the car which backed about at the door. Leaning on her elbow she took a gayety from the yellow of the wagon and the bold design of the printed words and from the brisk

man who sold packages to her aunt with a clatter of good-will and gossip. Tea in packages, coffee, sugar—the best cane—and did she need any spices this trip? Liniment, salve, mange cure, soap, oil, baking powders, ointment, camphor, ginger, orris root, sal hepatica, lice eradicator—for hens, cures mites, chiggers. Any extracts? flavors? perfumery? cake color? ice-cream powders? sage?

“The coffee and sugar is all.”

“A sight of rain over in the creek country. Water outen bounds.”

“Anybody drowned?”

“Nobody drowned, but a heap of swollen branches and some stock washed off. Old Man Tumey’s chickens, and Lige Smith lost a calf. They say prices are a-goen high this time, money for everybody. Corn sold this week for around two dollars. Old Miss Bee Beach is right sick, they say. Bound to die, I reckon.”

He shouted his words before the house and his rough voice struck the corners of the room above and quickened life where it had declined in her breast. His steps were rough and strong on the gravel of the roadway. When the purchase had been made he ran quickly through his list again and closed the rear door of the truck with a crash. Then he swept off his hat to mop his head with a dim handkerchief of some yellowed silk, sponging his face and neck. He plunged the handkerchief inside his collar-band, and he stretched his legs and his back, a tall man with a dark vigor about

him. Theodosia leaned on her arm to watch him, amused at the painted words on the car, the long rheumatic letters that spelled the liniment to the afflicted of the county. His vigor reached her where she lay crumpled under the bed clothing, and she had a quick vision of herself, arisen, going about her ways of life. She watched every gesture as he climbed into the car and set it in motion, she concentrated to his burning darkness, her throat dilated in response to the unaccustomed man's voice. When he was gone she sank weakly back to the bed and presently she made the minute journey to the roadside gate, step by step, negotiating intricately with the roadside birds and grasses.

Some days later she heard the throb of another car on the driveway and presently a voice spoke to Doe Singleton at the door, the voice turning away, saying that it would come again. This would be Frank, she reflected. Her aunt would not bring him to her room because she was in bed and the aunt moved among a few old signs and tokens. None but the old dogs ever walked on the stairway except when she herself replied to the call from below, "Come on now, it's ready." Summer having advanced, the night-noises made a great swinging water, a vast throbbing sea of sound beating continually and arising in shrill waves, the crickets, the frogs, the toads, the treetoads, the katydids. An old voice then, a joyous rise and skurry of man's speech, acutely remembered in all its inflections.

"Ladybug, when you hear a katydid, it's then six weeks till frost. Yessir. Six weeks. I often took notice to a katydid that-away. It's a forerunner to frost for fair. . . . Oh, it's a good morning. . . . Someways I always liked a hilltop. . . ."

THE tenant would come about the house talking noisily, his voice striking the wall with a token of life in the fields. Cuttings of hay, stand of wheat, stand of rye, prime good crop of burley this time, "fair good corn if it turns out well in the shock at plucken time"—these were his cries as they smote the upper wall and rolled in at the open windows. There would be money from Doe Singleton's acres to augment her bank account and her securities. Once her banker called, making a low clatter of steps and voice as he went in and out. One of the dogs, old True, died in the upper hallway, stretched out stiff when the morning food called Theodosia down the stairs, laid out across the carpet. Later one of the tenant men dragged her away, the body pulled by a rope making a dull stiff clattering of noises on the hard stair. The strong sour odor of her death pervaded the hall for many days after.

Theodosia did not keep the count with the katydid, but the frost came, the leaves richly responding. The katydids had sung their own well-timed requiem. After the season of the first frost the rains set in, plodding

heavily on the old walls, wetting the ceilings where the roof leaked. The drip of the water made a continuous impertinence upon her carpeted floor. She arose and set several basins under the drips and climbed shivering back into the bed. In the morning after a continued rainfall of many hours her bed stood under a new drip.

"The roof upstairs leaks everywhere, Aunt Doe," she said. "There's hardly a dry place left. Maybe you never noticed it, but the roof ought to be mended. The plaster might fall."

Doe Singleton was tall and straight, a rantasy of old age, her movements hurried and uncertain. Her hair, white now, had turned coarse and frizzled with its graying. When the report of the roof came to her, her mouth became straighter and more thin. She dipped her bread into her coffee and ate slowly, saying nothing.

"Want more bread?" she said after a little, a curious cheerfulness, reiterated each mealtime over the food.

Theodosia moved to the east room, across the hall, for there were fewer leaks there and the bed could be kept dry. She set three basins under the drips in her new quarters and closed the door of the west room upon its wet misery. When she had lain ten days without fever at any time during the day she might arise and walk a few steps into the yard. This was the doctor's suggestion when he came in the autumn, his last visit, and found her lung healed. It was difficult to achieve the ten in consecutive occurrence, and with each failure she must begin the count anew.

HER grandfather's books were in their boxes in the hall, half-unpacked, tumbled together as she had searched among them. In the east room she looked at the walls her grandfather had seen when he lay in Doe Singleton's house, herself across the hall then in the room with Annie. The likenesses of the Bells and the Trotters stood in stiff frames, awkwardly placed along the walls, and once, indifferent to what she did, she arose and rearranged the small frames to a happier proportion, driving the small tacks with the poker from the fireplace. She was often insulated from her own thought by pain in her head, in her abdomen and loins. The autumn was bright and long, lingering warmly after the leaves had fallen.

She would fasten her eyes upon the ship, a chromo picture framed in old gilt, a dull brown mounting. A great still ship, caught on the upward wash of a wave and tilted with the wind, frozen forever with one stayed moment. Its great sail lay out on the current of the air and its round keel swelled high out of the plume of water from which it had arisen and on which it now hung. Frank was turned away from the door by the same reiterated cheerfulness that responded to the food. "You better come again when she's up and down-stairs. Come again, young man."

She wondered if she could still count ten rightly and she began to mark the days on an old calendar. Insulated by pain, she would turn to the driveway and walk minutely down imagined paths through the first

light snow. She brought wood from her aunt's hearth and built fires on her own. The required ten days fell in the end of November and she walked weakly a little way under the trees among the fallen leaves. Later she brought wood each day from the old wood-lot behind the garden, the journey to the woodpile becoming her daily measure of exercise. An old pile of cut wood was stored there under a small shed, a pile of which her aunt seemed to have no knowledge. The wood the tenant man brought to her aunt's room was scarcely enough now for the one fire below-stairs. She had heard her aunt give an order, had heard her complain to the tenant of the waste.

"No use to waste the wood so. Eight pieces a day is enough, now." The words had come above mingled with the tumbled wood as it fell, or mingled again with the retreating steps of the man as they fell stiffly on the pavement.

DOE SINGLETON sat all day reading her books. She would bring an armful of novels from the front room, the room where she had lived with Tom Singleton, and she would set herself upon them, one after the other. They were books she had read in her youth and had reread many times since. Theodosia would hear her come to the room below, a dull monotony of steps and of books plucked about in the bookcases, and hear

her return, the door closed, the journeys irregularly placed as her demands required. In the back room she would read all day, and, going down for food, Theodosia would see her book where it had been laid aside and would mark her swift progress through the pages. The food was kept in the storeroom behind the chamber, and the old pageant of the aunt handing out the supplies from this doorway, Prudie waiting with full hands, would arise. The door was locked as in the former time, the key hidden away. Miss Doe would bend over the fireplace in the chamber, cooking there. One day Theodosia, leaving after a meal, went into the dining-room and thus to the kitchen where Prudie had cooked. The range was gone from its place, but she recognized a part of it in a mass of broken iron behind the door. She stared at the stale cobwebs that hung from the ceiling in a dusty fringe, and she sickened at the odors of mice, her mind contemptuous of the sickness in her throat and her mouth. She looked again and again for some token of Prudie and the ancient bustle and order of the house, her eyes clinging to an old felt hat, some man's headwear, thrown down in the corner of the pantry and defiled by mice and mould.

At her aunt's table she would talk of one thing and another, asking questions of the past, of Aunt Deesie, of Prudie. Where had they gone? Was her uncle's grave marked by a stone? She would walk out there some day when she had grown stronger.

"Which do you like best, Dickens or Scott or Cooper?" she asked.

"About the same, one as the other. A good love-story is what I like best. Want more bread?"

There was bread and milk and a bit of meat sometimes. A pie baked before the open fire or a bit of a pudding.

"When I'm better maybe you'll have the kitchen fixed up and I'll run it, Aunt Doe. Or we could have somebody to cook. There's a heap to do in a farm kitchen, I know. I'll take the bother of it any time you want. . . ."

"I'm well enough off as I am. I don't want a big rumpus inside the house."

She dwelt on the kitchen as Prudie had kept it, the busy mornings there, the kettles steaming on the stove, to try to make it reappear as a part of a pleasant way. She remembered some droll sayings of Prudie's talk and restored Lucas with a swiftly sketched picture.

"Remember how Prudie used to say, 'But stick inside your shirt-tail, Lucas, afore you go in to wait on white folks. Shirt-tail always out.' Remember Prudie?"

"But I like the way I got now. No bother. All I need is right here. I'm well enough off to suit me," Miss Doe said.

THE journey up the stairs required several pauses for rest on the way, and, this accomplished, she was glad

to sink into the kindness of the bed. Her flesh was soft like wax. She would look at her strange hands and listen to her fluttering breath. It was spring, she reflected, seeing the swelling buds on the linden tree and hearing the birds at morning. At night the up-and-down seesaw of the frogs in the pond came to her if the breeze were drifting in from the east. Frank came sometimes, always in the late afternoons. She would talk with him on the portico where she would sit wrapped well in shawls. She worked feebly, a little at a time, and rid the parlor of its cobwebs and dust.

A sweet smell of cut grass spread over the farm. The white-top was standing over the clover among the high heads of straying timothy, and then the field was mowed for hay. The oat field was green, and shaken in the breeze it was broken like lace. The rye had turned yellow. The two men, Walter and Abe Bland, had finished setting the tobacco in the field along the creek, and her mind's eye knew how their plows went there although this field was beyond the hill's rise and thus beyond her vision. Across the road were two neighboring farms and the matrons there sometimes called on Miss Doe in the fine weather. Seen distantly these houses were full of the busy appearances of life. People came and went from the white house where the Bernards lived, and Miss Alice Bernard, the wife and mistress of the place, would tell of the goings and comings among all the farms, of the berries she had canned and the jams she had made. Miss Doe would

acquiesce, remotely smiling; they would be sitting in the shade of the portico. Seen from the upper window, the house where Miss Alice lived presented a remote drama. The shutters, green against the white wall, were opened and closed daily, and people went hurrying down the driveway to the highroad and thus away to the town. In the other house, far to the left, there were two young girls. "They think of me as being very old," Theodosia thought. She would see them at morning riding their horses, cantering along the road.

She had learned to lift the bow and the fiddle above her breast and to hold them there. Looking out on the earth from the portico where she rested almost all day in an old reclining chair, she would play airs from an overture or a caprice or a sonata, bending the tune to the outspread fertility of the fields and the high tide of mid-summer with herself apart, insulated by the wax-like softness of her flesh and dispossessed by the penurious withdrawals of the house. Out before the wall, in the light of summer, seeing the richness of the fields and the lush plenty of the days, she would surround herself with thin spectral music from which passion had been withdrawn. She kept a sense of hush to her own past.

SHE could walk now to the stile going over the fence, the way the tenant man, Walter, took in going to and

from the house. It was a rude stile that some farmhand had constructed of such plunder as he had found, a log split and a board on end. Sitting on the slab of the log she could look down the pasture where some unbroken colts ran.

"Them colts is too braysh," Walter said one day as he passed by the stile. "They need a plow line, them fillies." He passed down the path mumbling his grievance.

She sat on the stile and searched his rough speech after his departure. He was a strong man, past middle life, sturdy and wind-stained, a hardness in the muscles of his face and some austerity in his eyes. His teeth were broken and yellowed with tobacco. He would look past her when he spoke, drawing his eyes as if to see afar, but when he looked back at her his face would gather to a sum of its severity. He lived with his brother in Aunt Deesie's cabin, and neither he nor the brother had a wife.

She would walk a little farther each day and sit to rest on the stile. Beyond the fence the ricks for feeding cattle had once stood, and she remembered the dogs on the day they had set upon her and little Annie, and she wondered if the dogs that were now about the house were, any of them, the same. An intense desire to have her former strength drove her to walk her distances several times a day, but she often sank wearily to the ground under some tree and lay there for an hour. As she lay thus on the ground she knew that

Walter walked through the farm, his rough shoes brushing the low weeds, and that his brother Abe kept in the lower fields near the tobacco barn. She would gaze up at the insecure sky where the clouds turned on the horizon and watch the hazardous trees shake lightly in the wind and lose now a leaf and now another, or in the later summer two or three would fall. She knew that Walter knew that she lay to rest there; sometimes she would see his sullen face set forward as he tramped across the pasture rim.

At long intervals her aunt hung a signal on the pillar of the portico and the liniment-man brought his truck to the door to sell her sugar, coffee, and tea. These days were always Thursdays. Sometimes she would walk to the truck and look in at the bottles and spice cans, all labeled in yellow, all lettered with the name of the brand. He would chant his tale again to try to tempt her buying. Spices, baking powders, ointments, camphor, ginger, orris root, sal hepatica, lice eradicator, flavors, perfumery, cake color, ice-cream powder, sage.

"Here's something to take the eye of a young lady. Perfumery and face powder. The best there is. Both in one box. Fifty cents to a dollar."

"She's not much hand to fix up," Miss Doe said.

"Or ice-cream powders. Makes fine ice-cream. Freezes twice as fast too."

"Does it take an ice-cream freezer," Theodosia asked. "And some ice, maybe? Or just the powder?"

"Of course it takes a freezer. Or say, here's a little something for a young lady that's nice and particular."

He would run through the list of his wares again and when the buying was determined he would give some news of the farther valley. Caleb Burns had lost a fine cow, and a fine cow on Burns's place was a sure-enough fine one. Registered Shorthorns. His dark vigor made a violence about him and his tall strong legs beat on the gravel as he stepped quickly about. His hands were strong on the door of the truck when he slammed it. His nails were untended and he would pluck at his nose with his thumb, remembering his handkerchief afterward. She would go back to the portico, delicately amused, rejecting him, pleased with the incident, and he would climb into his vehicle and set it in motion, making a bow toward her in his departure.

She wished for some other contact beside Frank, who came now every week or two. She remembered too vividly his face, his gestures, his presence after his departure. She was lying on the ground under the linden tree, seeing the pods of the linden that hung under each leaf by a slender stem of green. Walter and Abe would be cutting the tobacco in the lower field. The wild horses ran roughly up and down their pasture, their hoof-heavy tread thundering, the young stallion stopping to paw the grass until the dust rose from beneath it. She could scarcely divide this year from last year except by some memory of herself lying in the bed above the stairs, counting days to achieve ten

unfevered. Now she lay on the rough grass and herbs under the linden tree not far from the pine, not far from the portico. She remembered Frank from time to time, or he welled upward from within her own being, his hands that seemed strong now as set beside no other hands. She remembered his face, his gray eyes, his still brow, his scrutinizing stare, a picture of his throat, his hand on his thigh.

"I must have some other people," she said, stirring as she lay to dispel the too-acute picture. "If I could walk to some other house. Go anywhere. . . ."

THE cow at the tenant house was dry now and there was no milk. "Now let's see," she thought, turning her mind again and again to the problem. Miss Doe had grown weary. She leaned all day over the novels, her eyes in a dim trance when she was called. There was milk on the neighboring farms, Theodosia thought, but she had no money. "You've got as much to eat as I've got," Miss Doe said. "You've got as much milk and eggs as you see me eat."

She was in the back room at the hour of food, waiting. The pones for the dogs baked on the hearth.

"Let me help, Aunt Doe," she said. "Let me help you do something."

"I'll mind my own house. Just keep your seat whilst I manage my own."

The great pones lay over hot coals to bake, the flying ashes dusting over them. The books were piled on the deep window sill. The bed in the back of the room was spread with a dark pieced quilt of some old design. Dust had settled over the quilt and over the pillows that were laid in funeral rigidity at the top of the bed. Walking near the bed to examine the design of the quilt, Theodosia suspected that her aunt did not sleep in the bed.

"Is this the sunshine-and-shade quilt?" she asked. "Did you piece it? You bought it from an old woman. It's pretty and faded now, the colors blended. They're pretty, faded together like that. . . ."

The dust on the quilt and on the pillows made her know they were never disturbed. The quilt was clean under the pillows and the bed was always plumped carefully, the quilt on it in the same way. It was never used, she surmised, and she wondered where her aunt lay to sleep. There was a roll of old quilts thrown into the storeroom where the food was kept.

Miss Doe brought out a small leather cake of wheat bread she had cooked by the fire and a bit of conserve that was old and dry. A few brown crackers.

ON her way to the wood-lot in the first cold of a November day when the wind was whipping the trees and shrubs and the leaves were falling in mad disaster, "A

woman, I am, walking to gather firewood in a wild storm," she said. In a wind-whipped bush she found a song-sparrow's nest, revealed now to sight by the up-turned branches and the dispersing leaves. She broke the nest from the bush and carried it away. It was made of fine twigs rounded and woven with perfect care, the wooded ends and strands growing more delicate as they approached the center, the pool where the eggs had lain. This cup was lined with human hair, soft and red-brown, laid in an exquisite hollow to make a lining, her own hair. Walking back through the angry air that twisted her garments and beat her steps from the path, a wind that would cry "It is done, make a swift end then," and would tear life out of the trees and wrench summer off from the sagging vine on the house wall, a fervor of joy welled in her senses and spread backward to some quiet inner part. She had had this ineffable relation with the bird. Unknown to her, the nest had lain on the bough of the old lilac bush all summer, had been built in the spring. The wind slammed the door on the outside violence and she was free of bodily struggle, ribbons of exhaustion and pain unwinding upward into her thighs and back. She placed the nest on her table and looked at it from time to time, picking it delicately apart to try to discover its order.

In the untended pastures the withered white-top and frost-flowers, rejected by the horses, shook stiffly in the cold gusts. The silkweed puffs had blown and their

shards were left standing above the dried sweet-fern and the bittersweet. It was now the dark season when night comes on at the earliest hour.

She turned away from her thin face, seen quickly in a mirror, and fear that had crouched in her thought leaped to become a pain in her breast. She was losing what she had gained, the little she had so carefully built together. It was difficult now to walk her small round, through the trees, along the fence to the stile, to the wood-lot, back up the stair. A dragging weariness which she thought would be hunger gnawed at her body. She had talked of it to her aunt, saying, "When I am stronger I will go." A curious smile had settled to the dim eyes that were glassed over with the fantasies of books.

She was walking out toward the stile in the cold of a December day, the wind blowing her dress and beating through her thin blood, changing her breath to a quivering chill. It came to her as she neared the stile that she would go to the tenant man, Walter Bland, and say, "I must have food, every day; I will sell something. My books are all I have. How will I do it? What shall I do?" She would say, "As a human being and a neighbor, tell me what I'd better do. You know yourself how Aunt Doe lives. We are all here together on the farm. Now what must I do?" He would be rude and rough in his speech, but he would suggest some plan. He would do something.

She climbed over the stile with a new strength and

went down the pasture slowly, stopping to regain her panting breath. She was glad that she had decided to do this. A strength greater than she had came to her with the determination and the satisfaction in her plan. She thought that Bland might want some of the books for himself, and she began to name in mind such of the books as might be within his reach. Walter came suddenly out of the brush at the foot of the pasture, just where she entered the field. Her hand was reached to the loop of the wire that held the field gate in place. He came out of the cherry brush suddenly and stood ten feet away. A hard voice accompanied his approach, spreading through the cherry glades and meeting the cold of the wind on the briars.

“You keep on back up the hill. Don’t you be a-comen down here now. You keep on back up where you belong.”

She tried to say what she had come to say, her words entangled until they were meaningless. The voice spoke out steadily over her struggle to speak.

“You keep on back up to the house.” He glanced fearfully toward the field and the way of the cabin. “You got no business here. You go on back.”

Her words rushed out upon her breath and were shaken with the chill of her body. Her plan would not yield to his uncomprehended speech, and she stood against the gray weathered gate. She drew the flying ends of her bright scarf from before her eyes and stated

again her errand. He spoke over her words, trampling them out with his rough voice.

"You keep on back up the hill. . . . Where you stay. . . . Anything happens, who is't gets strung up to a limb? Not you. You go on back. Don't you be a-comen down this-here way. On back. . . . You go on, I say."

She was climbing the rise again, walking along the path, facing the wind now, moaning softly as she went. The cold cut her garments apart and entered her flesh, past her chilled blood. She labored with the low hill and came at last to the stile.

She was drowsed by fatigue and dulled by the cold. She went to the evening bit of food, her life stilled, scarcely knowing when she had eaten the last of the leather cake. When this was done she built a fire on the parlor hearth with wood she had brought there some days earlier and made the wood stand high over the blaze. There would be a great glow, a holiday burning of the demon sticks she had carried, two and two, from the wood-lot. A dozen now went on the flame. She put on a soft gray dress she had saved from her former wardrobe and twined a warm rose-and-yellow scarf about her shoulders.

She sat in the parlor before the high fire and felt the color gather richly above her scarf'd breast. The sofa on which she sat ran before the fire in a retreating curve of black, and her mind caught in the irony of

warmth and the color that wrapped her throat. Frank came, opening the door for himself, knocking softly and entering, rubbing his hands for their cold, eager for the fire, for the color, eager for herself. He sat beside her and presently he began to kiss her face and her throat and to whisper strange words, but she stared into the blaze and turned his caresses aside with her ironic mind where yes and no functioned identically. His hands were on her body beneath the glowing scarf, were feeding her body, and the fire was food again, these foods rich in their insufficiency. Frank was a kindness at her side, at her ear, at her mouth, and it appeared to her that she would ask him for help. She turned toward him crying with her broken breath close to his ear, "Frank, I'm so hungry. I'm hungry. I never have enough. I'm hungry. Aunt Doe . . . I never have real food. I'll starve." He warmed her with his caresses, murmuring some pleasure in his bestowal, and she floated out of life, warmed, and presently was appeased and comforted.

She had fallen into a deep inner reverie from which nothing could arouse her. She heard as a long way off the monotony of Frank as he talked. He sat apart from her now, or he had gone, had kissed her in the moment of his departure. He would come back, she could be sure of that, some voice had said. The night would be cold, was cold. Daylight came late. It was winter now, snow on the ground, on the wood in the pile at the back of the wood-lot. The noise of the woodpeckers

was strange against the snow, was flattened by the snow. A day was but little different from a night, she observed under the fog of her reverie, one being light, the other dark, a mere difference. Sleep, wake, sleep. The journey to the woodpile was the one link that bound her to that strange and foregone experience, the ways people go and the things people do.

At this time she began to hear voices speaking to her. In the dark of the night or in the cold bright days when she lay in her bed, the windows opened wide, she would stare at the faded rose and pearl of the ceiling or the faded gray of the walls, and the winter knocking of the woodpeckers among the trees about the house would fit into her sense of light and become identical with it. She would lie in an apathy, scarcely breathing, divided in mind, uncoördinated by hunger and unintegrated by pain. Lying thus one day, looking at the woodpecker's cry as it lay along the ceiling and was interlaced with the faded rose and pearl of the vignettes there, a first voice spoke to her, saying, "The categories of the flesh . . ." The words receded when they had been said, leaving ripples of flat tone behind, flat words that rode on some rhythm. When the words had receded beyond the reach of hearing and her ears were dulled with listening to their spent rhythms, the voice spoke suddenly again.

FIRST VOICE: The categories of the flesh.

"What are they?" she asked, her own voice as real as that which had spoken and as earnest. She began to turn the saying about to see what it would give. Then another voice spoke sharply, swiftly, a hard voice blurting out its rough saying.

SECOND VOICE: The hunger of the mouth.

An inner voice spoke then, a third speaker, more, subtle and persuasive, saying, "And then there's Frank."

FIRST VOICE: A category too. He is.

THEODOSIA: Well, then, well? An occurrence—one happening. . . .

She was dull to Frank, to any reminder of him. She stirred wearily in the bed and drew her knees together, crossing her feet.

FIRST VOICE: The intense will to continue is centered in the individual organism, and thus, or for this, the matter of continuation is entrusted to the instance.

THIRD VOICE: Brain turned into a walnut and then got a worm in it. . . .

THEODOSIA: The genteel poor. I've always heard

it said they were the greatest sufferers on the earth.

FIRST VOICE: And suppose, as Science says, it's unlikely that there's anything comparable to human life on any other planets. Human life, then, lonely in the great space of the sky, swinging around through space without greeting, without advice or sympathy, afraid.

SECOND VOICE: Drunk to get more of itself!

THIRD VOICE: What if . . . Suppose she got more. She. Theodosia.

SECOND VOICE: Love of God! What would it be?

THEODOSIA: Nothing comparable to life on any other . . . Human life, that is. It must look strange from the outside, this one, when you see the whole lot come in a whirl around the sun. Mercury first, then Venus, then the one with life on it. Maybe it makes it look different. Pain, try-to-do, try-again. Stuff that can look up and down on it, stuff that can say, "God, God!"

FIRST VOICE: And God took up a handful of dust from the ground and mixed it with his own spittle and formed man. A God-handful of dust and the spittle out of the mouth of God.

SECOND VOICE: In the beginning was the spittle of God, and the spittle was with God. Must have a different smell, the one with life on it. "Phew!" they'd say, "here comes that stinken one."

THEODOSIA: I'll begin back at the first. Take it all

over again. Run through the first scale lessons. Bow practice. Where's the book of duos? As soon as I'm strong enough, the trills.

SECOND VOICE: As soon as you're strong enough! Love of God! How'll you get strong on three bites of leather hoecake?

FIRST VOICE: And half the time she throws the queer stuff up.

A melody came beating lightly through the noise of her thought, inconsequential, irresponsible to any remembered design of song, under the melody a thud of irregular rhythms delaying it with intricate patterns of silence. Her fingers twitched toward the shelf where the fiddle lay, pointing without motion, drawn under the covering of the bed, her hands folded into her armpits for warmth. The melody lived as a fragile pattern creeping from key to key, spontaneously erecting itself out of some inward repository of dancing, sinking and rising, repeating itself in its own shadow when it fell away, becoming then the still rhythmic nothing of anti-song. Returning afterward, it tapped even more lightly with whisper music that broke upon a faint up-and-down, a mountain ascending and descending, contrived and defeated in a slow design, regular, living each moment and dying in succession, her own breathing. Her breath pushing in and out upon the air, denting the air.

SHE was sitting in the parlor before the fire which burned the wood she had carried stick by stick from the wood-lot. Dark had long since come. The wind among the trees made a noise like the rush of water in a river, and the night was very dark outside. Once she looked from the window, leaning against the cold glass and bending her neck to see overhead. Back at the fireside again, the whining of the wind in the chimney and the crack of the dry burning logs was a clicking of summer insects shut into winter, imprisoned in frost.

The old bitch, Old Mam, had littered in a bedroom at the end of the upper hallway, three weak puppies in a writhing heap on a bed of rags. They would die of the cold. It would be cold above-stairs, she reflected, her fire untended, the sour odor of cold cleaving the air, rising from the window ledges and gathering at last to the bed. It would be cold beyond the walls of the house, beyond the reach of her fire; all night the air would grow more and more dense with cold. The pond down by the creek would be frozen, a thick sheet of ice to be broken in the morning by some axe. To lie all night on the ground ten feet from the place where she sat would be death to life, the end of all vigor. She would lie on the frozen grass, willing, she predicted, and the wind would search out her thin dress, her thin blood. Determination would hold her there. Pain would wrap around her, fixed into her limbs and her body

and her brain, and finally she would become drowsed. All would recede, the all meaning her memory of life. "Was it for this?" something would ask, saying, "You were saved at birth by care, some care, and were taught, praised, kept—a curious thing—for this." A black irony. Drowsiness would settle nearer. It was for this. Morning would come and she would lie still, frozen, ten feet from the spot in which she now sat, her hands bent, her body stiff, the waters of her flesh congealed, ice in her mouth.

She moved nearer to the fire with a sharp cry and held her hands to the flame, leaning her body nearer. She looked at her hands as she rubbed them well into the warmth of the fire's radiance, her thin narrow hands moving with life, blood in their channels, and she loved her hands.

Frank was coming in at the hallway, closing the front door, whistling. In the next instant came a great clutter of leaping feet, confused thought, cries, growls, oaths, blows. A rush of animal feet on the stairway and more outcries. She went to the door of the parlor and opened it wide, and Frank was there trying to defend himself from two dogs, another dog coming down the stair. He was kicking at the beast that was at his feet, but another was at his breast, leaping.

She drove the dog, Old Mam, from his breast, ordered her back with a sharp command. There were four dogs now in the dim hallway, one coming from the region beyond the stair.

"This house, it's full of devils," Frank cried out. He was drawing back toward the door. "This whole damn place is a den of demons. For God's sake keep that dog off me!"

The dogs went away sullenly, Old Mam above to her whelps, Tilly to lie at Miss Doe's door until it opened for her tapping.

"This house, it's full of devils." He was coming striding across the carpet toward the fire, indignation scarcely waning. He opened the door to the dining-room and gazed into the blackness beyond, listening. "Ugh! devils, demons, ghouls!" He slammed the door quickly. "You wouldn't catch me out there. I wouldn't go out that door. . . You couldn't bribe me to go."

FIVE large pones of coarse bread, unsifted meal stirred with water and set in skillets of hot grease to bake before the fire, this was the food for the old dogs. Miss Doe mixed it with her hands or with a spoon that was never cleaned. It baked on the hearth all morning, not far from the place where Tilly and Old Mam lay. While it cooked Tilly would sometimes sniff at each hot pone, impatient for the heat to do its work. The thick vapors and gases from the dogs spread through the room, and Theodosia ate her small leather wheat cake quickly and went back to her chamber to lie

weakly down. The voices began to ply, issuing and receding.

FIRST VOICE: The receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged. Said Anthony hath given, granted, bargained, sold, transferred and released, and by these presents doth give, grant, bargain, sell, transfer and release unto said Goodwin a certain tract of land situated, lying and being in the county aforesaid on the south side of Casey Run. . . .

THEODOSIA: Situated, lying and being. Theodosia, born a Bell, now situated, lying and being. Here. Herself.

FIRST VOICE: Could a woman butcher a hog?

SECOND VOICE: How many hogs has Frank butchered for you? Did Frank ever offer you a hog?

THIRD VOICE: Come, let us butcher a hog together. The celestial hog. A sea hog that swims in the river of forgetfulness. Easy to know and lived in a lonely place.

SECOND VOICE: Took the trouble to look into the matter of the old lady's will. Peeped around and made old Daniels talk. How about the Singleton farm, old lady Singleton, Miss Doe, they call her? Does anybody know how old Miss Doe is a-leaven her estate? Horace Bell and Theodosia are her natural heirs. . . . If Theodosia is to get the farm. . . . Easy to do.

She settled her whole mind upon some event, long past, selected at random from the nothingness of all forgotten events and brought forward to be examined minutely. It was the meeting, some meeting, of the literary society at the Seminary—quotations, addresses, papers, debates. She began to recite carefully, dwelling on each phrase with humorous interest, sucking from each its last degree of pleasure.

And, "Please your honors," said he, "I'm able
By means of secret charms to draw
All creatures living beneath the sun,
That creep or swim or fly or run,
After me as you never saw!
And I chiefly use my charm
On creatures that do people harm,
The mole, the toad, the newt, the viper;
And people call me the Pied Piper."

SECOND VOICE: The murderer. Murder in her hands.
A snake in her belly.

A FOURTH VOICE, *screaming*: She eats murder and snakes.

FIRST VOICE: Frank. She asked him for bread and he gave her a snake.

SECOND VOICE: If you had a hog to kill for food, could you butcher a hog? Would you?

THEODOSIA: I'd have no idea how to go about it.

SECOND VOICE: Knock it in the head with the axe. Then watch it bleed. Stick its throat and catch the

blood in a dish. Blood is good to drink. Blood pudding. Cut it open along the bacon. Cut out the melt first. Hog liver fried in fat is good. A little onion. Pepper. Makes your mouth water.

THEODOSIA: But the hog is still alive. Where is the hog now?

FIRST VOICE: You asked him for bread and he gave you a serpent.

SECOND VOICE: What was she out to kill?

FOURTH VOICE: She helped Lethe kill Ross.

SECOND VOICE: She wanted to kill. Kill! kill! Why didn't she kill a hog?

THEODOSIA: Where was I? Oh, yes.

And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying
As if impatient to be playing
Upon his pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled.

THIRD VOICE: She wanted to kill. There was a night when she had kill inside her. She helped Lethe do her work.

SECOND VOICE: Why isn't she in prison then?
Where's Lethe?

THEODOSIA:

As if impatient to be playing
Upon his pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled.

SECOND VOICE: Her hand went with Lethe's. Into Ross. All night blood ran out.

FOURTH VOICE: Too bad it wasn't a hog. Melts fried in fat make a right good dish. Onion. A little butter.

THEODOSIA:

Upon his pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled.

SECOND VOICE: She likes to forget it. All night Ross bled out his life. A man, he was, what they call life in his body, and then he went out, a slash in his throat.

THEODOSIA:

And as for what your brain bewilders,
If I can rid your town of rats,
Will you give me a thousand gilders?

THIRD VOICE: Took the trouble to find out about the will. Peeped around and quizzed old Daniels. How now, is old Miss Doe a-leaven her farm? Too bad. Told her the second time he'd had her. Too bad. Left it all to some charity, every cent. Some kind of hospitals away off somewhere, a long way off. In trust to some board.

THEODOSIA:

The mountain and the squirrel
Had a quarrel;
And the former called the latter Little Prig.
The former called the latter . . .

SECOND VOICE: Told her after he'd had her. Sat

back afterward, cool, to smoke a little. Said old Daniels gave him to know. Too bad. Not a cent to any niece. All to some hospital. Away off somewhere.

THEODOSIA:

To make up a year
And a sphere.
And I think it's no disgrace
To occupy my place.

FIRST VOICE: She remembers Ross. A big man, he was. Dug ditches for the town. Whenever there was a heavy load or a big job . . .

SECOND VOICE: Then she ate a snake.

FIRST VOICE: Where's Lethe now? In the prison. Among the women. She works all day in a room with iron over the windows. Twenty years. When she comes out she'll be over fifty.

THEODOSIA: He is a fool that destourbeth the moder to wepen in the death of her child, til she have wept hir fille, as for a certein tyme . . .

FIRST VOICE: They sew all day, to make clothes for the men prisoners to wear. Over and over, a stitch, the same, over and over, never done.

THEODOSIA: You have to let her weep out her litter of tears. That's all there is to it.

THIRD VOICE: No more lovers, no more men. She killed her man. Theodosia helping.

FIRST VOICE: Why don't you tell Frank to bring you down food? F—o—o—d. A beefsteak. Give an

order. Speak plain this time. Say, "See here . . ."

SECOND VOICE, *a retreating laughter*:

That creep or swim or fly or run,
After me as you never saw!

THEODOSIA: I'll tell him nothing.

SECOND VOICE:

By means of secret charms to draw
All creatures living beneath the sun.

FIRST VOICE, *arguing*: Tell him how it is here. Say,
"As an old friend, Frank, I'll tell you my situation. . . ."

THEODOSIA: I'll say nothing. Shut your blabber.

SECOND VOICE: Last night while you were asleep a great black face, a man's face, mouth open, teeth wide, bloody throat, came swimming, tonight will come swimming close into your eyes, into the very light of your brain. Swims up into your sight.

She turned quickly toward the window to dispel the too-vivid dream and looked at the boughs of the trees as they stood as cold lace against the sky. Across the steep ledge of dull light some crows were moving on stiff wings, the movements of the birds and the birds being two separate things, unrelated. When the birds were gone the movement remained, sobbing against the wall of light.

A MORNING in January cut across the air in a different

way from a morning in some former month, she observed. The sky beyond the matted twigs of the trees crowded outward in unequal grays, but the twigs bore upward their January buds that were swollen in spite of the cold. She began to think of the Promethean substance, fire, diligently admired by man and guarded. First a few bits of thin wood at the end of a match, a faint sulphurous odor, a frail burning daintily coaxed to life and tenderly nursed by the shaded palm of a hand. The smoke would arise heavily, unwarmed as yet, and the blaze would spread and lie cautiously, perilously, buried under the damp smouldering wood. Another splinter and another, and then the blaze grows slowly, spreading laterally, having consumed the first splint and turned it to a bent cinder of red ash. Wood is laid across the steady blaze now and the fire laps lovingly around it. The cold slips back from the hearth and the breast reaches toward the warmth, the hands feel for it, outstretched. One is glad for it, grateful to it. In the northern zones man could not live without it. His life is owed to it. If the Promethean spell is lost man would shrink down toward the tropics, though the men might venture into the cold regions to hunt. Woman and fire are married now forever; she would have to have fire for herself and for the young.

She drew her hands under the coverlet to warm them and looked across at the dead hearth where the last of the wood was burnt. The pile in the wood-lot, saved for the evenings with the fiddle, would last, she thought,

for four more burnings, and her picturing mind slipped along the stack as it had stood in autumn in the wood-yard, the knotted edges of the hickory protruding, the lichenized beech sticks that were weathered and aerated, phantoms now. A few dry flakes of snow were falling, passing the opened window in a slanted line. Once man had got it he could never live without the Promethean gift, she thought, her gaze not lifted from the passing snow to the dead hearth but seeing both in one wide-spread plane of vision without focus.

Accustomed-unaccustomed sounds came from somewhere below. The liniment-man was at the door, the aunt crouching under an old cape receiving her purchases from the portico. His voice:

“Sakes-alive! It’s weatheren outside today. A right hard winter it is, I reckon. But it won’t be long now. No teacher yet for the Spring Valley school. Folks over there is right put-to to find a teacher. Miss Hettie up and married in the middle of the term and went off, resigned and went. Old Ronnie Beam’s wife has got a fine new girl up there, ten pounder, they say. I’ll tell you this-here, it’s weather. But it won’t be long now.”

The noises below sank to the usual delicate click and remote thump of silence, the front door having long since been closed and the steps having gone uncertainly back into the hallway.

SECOND VOICE: Old Ronnie Beam. Heaven sake!
Father Time has begotten. There’s no end to it.
Seventy years old.

FIRST VOICE: Why didn't she take some clean meal and make a mush over her fire? Eat it hot with salt.

SECOND VOICE: The habit of the locked storeroom.

THIRD VOICE: Thank God she hasn't got lice. What would she do to get rid of vermin?

THEODOSIA: Coal-oil out of the lamp. Kills, they say.

THIRD VOICE: A ten-pound girl. I tell you that-there, it's weather.

FIRST VOICE: The dog bread is not bad bread to eat; a little ashy, perhaps. Unsifted meal. Slobbered over by the two bitches, Tilly and Old Mam.

SECOND VOICE, *softly*: She eats the dog bread.

THIRD VOICE: A small musical talent. A limited achievement in music.

THEODOSIA: Small talents should not be allowed. Small talents are treason. They shouldn't be.

In the night she lay half asleep, running with the dogs as they hunted in the wooded slopes back of the fields. Young Blix, Nomie, Speed, Congo, they were on the trail of a hare, of a fox. She ran with them down the woods and pounded the earth of the plowed field, keen to the scent. She howled with them when the smell of the fox was renewed where the fence crossed the track. Congo turned toward her beyond the water of the creek when they had lashed swiftly over, clattering the rocks and dashing the spray. She ran neck to neck with Congo, seeing into his red mouth, feeling his flying

breath, his wide jaw. At the foot of the walnut tree they were on the varmint, all their teeth in his side, in his flank, leaping over him, tearing at his hide, emptying out his entrails, her teeth in his flesh.

ONE day after the evening meal below-stairs she turned to the hearth and broke a piece of one of the corn-pones that lay there withering under the heat since morning. She carried the bread to her room and ate a part of it as she sat before the cold hearth. The sticks were sacred to the fiddle and she did not burn one that night. Later there was speaking.

FIRST VOICE: This is the whole story of the earth.
He made love like a tomcat. Cat guts make fiddle
strings. Cat guts hale souls out of men's bodies.

THIRD VOICE: The daughter of the Don Juan of the
Kentucky villages. God knows!

FIRST VOICE: The first to be born as far as is known
at present was Lethe. River of forgetfulness. Her
name shall be Lethe, saying, I forgot myself. A
careless brown wench in a love mood and I forgot
myself.

THIRD VOICE: Then Americy. A whole continent to
name an incontinent hour.

THEODOSIA: A sad, kind-voiced creature. Given to
religious practices.

THIRD VOICE: Then Theodosia, given the surname Bell, the first so honored. Named for Theodosia Singleton, born Bell, sister to the Old War Horse. Godmother sucks all day at the sugar-tit of books, turns back again to the nipple to avoid knowledge.

SECOND VOICE: I drink to the health of the unbegotten!

THIRD VOICE: Then Stiggins. Curious eyes bent down at the corners. Slobbery mouth. A steel-cunning in his hand. Elastic speed, recoil and reach.

FIRST VOICE: Man is a nervous system. I once saw a picture of a man, a real likeness.

SECOND VOICE: I drink to the health of the unbegotten! [*Shouting.*] I drink to the health!

FIRST VOICE: He looked like something you might expect to see under a microscope. A ten-thousand-footed octopus, a rigmarole, a many-fanged serpent. A real likeness.

THEODOSIA: Something you might see under a microscope?

SECOND VOICE: A cunning in his hand, sewed up in a dull fist. Speed, recoil, reach. Stands above it a slobbery mouth.

FIRST VOICE: Annie, then. Fifth child. White, delicate. Fair hair, gray eyes, a frail body.

THEODOSIA: An angel among the white angels of the graves. All the sweetness of the earth brought into one frame. A tired little child, used to call to me to

wait, gentled by sickness and pain maybe. Her little mouth with the fresh dew of God on it.

FIRST VOICE: She was a nervous system, like all the others.

SECOND VOICE: Something you might expect to see under a microscope.

THIRD VOICE: James Henry Burden, then, sixth child born to Horace and first male heir to the house of Burden. I baptize thee, James Henry Burden, in the name of the . . . Second male in the house of Bell, as far as is known. Easy to know. Sweet, blonde languors among the cushions in a portico.

FIRST VOICE: I saw the picture of a man, a real speaking likeness. It was a ten-thousand-footed octopus.

THEODOSIA: What color was it?

FIRST VOICE: White and gray. They called the stuff white matter and gray matter.

THEODOSIA: Excellent names.

FIRST VOICE: A ten-thousand-footed serpent, every foot a feeler out to feel something.

SECOND VOICE: A maw in the middle of it, the chief part, the chief part set in the middle, a hungry enlargement in the alimentary gut.

THIRD VOICE: Another maw in the lower middle, the chiefest chief part, another hungry entrail, if you don't like the short word.

FIRST VOICE: A little knob, a very little knob on the

top. I saw the true likeness. An infinite number of feelers running out all ways, shaped like a serpent, and a very little knob on the top.

THEODOSIA: You couldn't blaspheme the human mind, you couldn't ever. To try to lower yourself by your own bootstraps. It wouldn't operate, that's all. You might try ever so hard, but you couldn't do it. Stumble? Fall over your own boots and stumble, yes, but if you did you'd never know it. What you didn't know couldn't happen.

SECOND VOICE: Oh talk! Which of the commandments have you not broken? Every last God's ten of the lot.

FIRST VOICE: There ought to be more than ten, ought to be about ten thousand more commandments. One for every nerve-end.

THIRD VOICE: A man could keep all ten and still be a writhing devil in hell.

SECOND VOICE: The whole thing draws itself inside its own maw, lies down to sleep in its snake's nest, replete, when it has enough.

FIRST VOICE: Yellow hair, Annie, and gentle ways. Loved everybody. The angel whiteness of the grave on her from the first. "How He took little children as lambs to His fold." The song.

THIRD VOICE: Your mother was dark, but this child was fair. Your father's own child. The one most like your father. Your father's own, then.

THEODOSIA: Oh, God, I believe, and there's nothing to believe.

She thought again and again of the pond below the hill in the creek bottom. The water would be fresh and sweet after the long winter rains and it would stand high along the banks. In the morning someone would find her body there, water-soaked, lying in the clean mud at the bottom of the water, stones tied to her feet. It would be easy to go out the door some night and never come back. Once she had gone out the door the rest would be inevitable, the door having become the line between to go and not to go. The front door seemed necessary, and she could not think tenderly of the morning, of any morning, of the stones that would be tied to her feet. All circumstances were set toward this departure. The days of the week, distantly comprehended, did not differ, one from another; Tuesday or Monday, Friday, all sank into a flat mass and were approached without emotion. She felt her hand as it was folded into the other hand and knew the feel of the bones and their bent articulations and the texture of skin as felt by itself. Prophecy gathered vaguely about the facts which were already well stated. One fact more remained as the act of departure. She slept lightly, her sleep weighted by the act, burdened by it.

A pleasant sense of Frank gathered in and out of her sleep, Frank representative of something he was

not, blended with the positive he signified and become one with it. A warmth as of life crept over her, memories that were symbols and dim anticipations. Half dreaming, her body knew that it would be renewed by his presence, that her beauty would be restored by his praise, that he would drape her scarf about her shoulders and set her hair to the way he liked. "It's pretty this way, soft ripples in it," a kind voice said, more kind than the voices of the dialogues. Kind voices were speaking now, voices of praise, giving warm life and the warm flow of blood through her members. The passage through the door receded and flattened to a mere saying, a doctrine. The kindness of Frank suffused her and the need of him ran over her. She knew clearly then the strength of his body as it was warm with life, his hands full of life-blood, his limbs rich with the throb of their joy. The odor of life was about him, the strength of people, of places, of people talking together.

A GENTLE rain had begun to fall and the snow of the day before would melt. She had waded to the wood-lot through the running snow and had brought in the last of the wood, six or eight pieces, piled now at the side of her hearth. A winter light lay on the running leaves of gray and silver and a winter apathy was settled deeply into the stilled vignettes at the border, the wood-

peckers knocking at the recurring tendrils that spread about the faded roses. The day, Wednesday, seemed on tiptoe, aware of itself. She could scarcely remember whether she had been down to her aunt's room for the noon meal or not. The light lying along the ceiling seemed to be an afternoon light, but the drifting of the rain across the air suggested morning. She tried to recall some detail of the descent for the food which would make the memory of it differ from every other descent. A picture of the old dog, Tilly, moving across the hearth near the baking pones of bread and lying down heavily on the stones beyond the hearth-rug came again and again. The dog had opened her mouth near the hot pone but she had drawn away, closing her mouth slowly with a yawn-spasm jerking her lower jaw, and just at that instant the clock on the mantel had begun to strike some hour.

THIRD VOICE: She's already dead, already dead. She died one night. Anyhow they found her on the old rags down before the fire, dead, in the room with five old crazy hounds. Found her on the floor rolled up in a knot, dead where she'd been asleep. Five insane old dogs, half-starved, in the room all night. She died on the floor with the dogs.

SECOND VOICE: This house, it's full of devils, full of demons, full of devils.

THIRD VOICE: Her bed had not been slept in for

months on end. Dust on the pillows. Dead, she is, already.

THEODOSIA: She didn't have to continue in life if she didn't want to. She didn't have to sleep in the bed either. She could sleep any way she wanted to. She didn't have to sleep in some regular way to prove she was alive.

SECOND VOICE: This house, it's full of devils.
[Screaming.] Full of demons.

THIRD VOICE: "See," they said. "Look, look, she ate the dog bread." What else is there around? Between her teeth a crust of the dog bread.

THEODOSIA: And very good bread it is. Don't be too light with the dog bread.

FIRST VOICE: The foul breath of an old fox-killing bitch on a hot pone and a clock strikes. That's what time is. There is nothing comparable to it on any other planet. Nothing like it.

THIRD VOICE: You are a murderer yourself. You, Theodosia. And an adulteress. Which of the commandments have you not broken?

THEODOSIA: I thought that was finished, settled.
I thought I'd put that by.

THIRD VOICE: What honor did you show your father? Why didn't you honor him as he wanted to be honored? Easy to know and lived in the same house.

Time was measured then by the walking of a dog

over a hearth, but the day, Wednesday, stood apart from time as having some entity of its own, some extra faculty. She saw innumerable dogs walking in procession across a hearth, ticking time, yesterday and tomorrow, forever, as far back as memory could reach. A warmth then began to drown her memory of Tilly and she knew in some inner way that it was afternoon and that Frank would come. A pleasant sense of Frank stole over her. He would talk a little of his success in the courts and gossip of law secrets, wills, marriage settlements, threatened procedures, giving comradeship. Perhaps he would grow amorous, offering compliments. Through him she would touch the world again. The vignettes on the border were fading with the waning day, the birds being still, the sun set. She sat up in the bed suddenly, the act a sudden cry to the departing light. Except for a few patches of lit upland, the landscape was dark now, settling into the shadows where the hills arose, biting at the sky with sullen lines along the west hill rim. Weak from the strain of sitting up suddenly she sank into a momentary apathy, but her breathing was one continuous burden borne by the prophecy which was already clearly stated as fact. She arose from the bed as if some determination had come to her. She felt herself moving slowly, but with little forward rushes of settled opinion, going straight without dalliance. She mended the fire without stint of the wood and dressed herself in the first gown that came to her hand, the gray wool gown, and took the scarf

to her shoulders. Her hands trembled with exhaustion, but she lit the lamp and carried it to the lower hall and set it on the table there.

She went to her aunt's room and lingered a little by the fire, taking a farewell of her by a quiet lingering, a few commonplace speeches passing between them, the old sayings of the months that were past. Of the two ordeals that lay before her she regarded Frank as the more difficult, for he and his disposal had not been predicted by prophecy or settled to an act, he being rather a menace within her own body where it reached toward life. The aunt settled to her book again, and Theodosia stood by the door of the room, waiting and listening, and presently there was a noise at the front door of the house. She went into the hall then, and, Old Mam and Tilly following after her, she let them come or she laid her hand on Old Mam's neck to keep her at hand. Frank was coming into the hall, was standing at the door looking cautiously back into the gloom of the half-lit spaces beyond the stairs.

She held Old Mam by the collar and called to Tilly, keeping them near. At the foot of the stairs she spoke to Frank across the ten feet that lay between them and she moved backward toward the steps, mounting the first, taking the dogs with her, holding them fast. He was arguing, outraged and unbelieving, growing angry. "I hold no grudge against you," she said. She kept the dogs close to her, holding their collars. I will never see you again," she said. "But I hold no grudge."

She had gone half-way up the steps now, but the ascent was difficult, the dogs unwilling to come. The dogs dragged her back; "They make it too hard," she thought, half yielding to their strength at the point where her own strength failed. Frank was commanding, accusing, saying she had not been fair.

"Drive those devils away," he shouted after her. "You drive those dogs off. I'm here now. I've come."

She was pushed by the great bodies of the dogs until she glided along the wall, but she moved upward, and the dogs came with her, a part of her ascending motion now. She took the dogs to her room and closed the door. The tumult in her mind had increased, for Frank had brought a newer quality of argument, of rational approach to himself. Pity for Frank worked in her now. He had called after her, "I want to marry you, Theodosia. That's what I want now in life." Frank was still below; the front door was yet open; she knew this by the draught under her door that sang a loud thin cry as the air rushed through the wide crevice and made for the loosely fitted window. Trembling, knowing that Frank was below, she began to hiss at Tilly, the more evil-tempered of the brutes, until the dog growled and barked in great anger, until she ran to the window and leaped again and again at the door. There was nothing left now but to walk out at the door when the menace of Frank should depart. She hissed up Tilly's anger whenever it abated. She sat relaxed in her chair, her muscles indifferent to their functions. Below-stairs

other dogs were in an uproar now, the whole house of dogs in a mad stir. She passed into the remote barkings of the dogs, already as dead, indifferent to the air she continued to suck in and out with her habitual breathing, indifferent to the icy water of the pond where it would lay pain about her. Her hissing was continuous with the anger of the dogs.

The crying of the draught under the door had ceased now, and the cold had ceased to rush along the floor. Then it seemed that a long while since she had heard the door below when it slammed and she heard the motor start. She continued to hiss Tilly's anger. Sitting indifferently in her chair, relaxed in every fiber, she lived only where the hissing breath came from her lips to stir the dogs. She had no relation to the bed in which she had lain formerly and no need or thought or memory of it, no possessive sense of it. The world became more and more dim as the fire sank lower, the air colored with a pink afterglow, and the dark crept nearer, a fact which she held somehow but to which she was indifferent. Old Tilly barked fitfully now, or lay exhausted in a corner of the room. She kept no relation to the fiddle as it lay on the table beyond the hearth, beyond the reach of the firelight; it was a darkened mass among the shadows of the table, holding a remote kindness for some being far apart from herself, identical with some abstract goodness that would never be stated. It gathered to a dim shadow that concentrated to a dull point and receded through elastic space to in-

finite depths of remoteness. She stared at the wall to the left of the fireplace, her vision having no function. Only one fact held truth in the singleness of prophecy. She saw herself leap from the chair suddenly and rush out at the door; a sudden start and she would be gone. She stared at the wall; the picture of her going, a felt picture, spread downward through her limbs that lay relaxed now, ready for the sudden spasm of movement.

At once a vivid appearance entered her mind, so brilliant and powerful that her consciousness was abashed. Larger than the world, more spacious than the universe, the new apparition spread through her members and tightened her hands so that they knotted suddenly together. It tightened her spine until she sat erect. Her recognition settled to a word, groped with words, settled again about a word, some word, catching at words with a net. The word was vivid, was like a new flower in a sunny place, and unable to say it she knew it with a rush of thanksgiving that out-ran all her recognition of it. The word she could not say, could only approach with reaching tentacles of memory and thought, erected a joy throughout her senses. Her body spread widely and expanded to its former reach, and the earth came back, herself acutely aware of it. A pleasure that she still lived to participate in this recognition caught her

throat with a deep sob. She had shifted her gaze so that she looked now into the fire. She sat leaned forward, tense with new life, with the new world, and she penetrated the embers with her gaze and saw into the universe of the fire, the firmament of dimly glowing heat that receded, worlds on worlds, back into infinites, atoms, powers, all replete with their own abundance. She laughed in her joy and went with the fire, more living now than the coals in the heart of the red ash. The word let a happy substitute stand for itself, a delegate appearing clearly defined, a word experienced as a glow of pride in life and joy. "Tomorrow" was the utterance, clearly placed then. On the next day the peddler would come along the road. This homely, habitual fact had been the Arise-ye of her resurrection. "I'm still alive," she sang under her breath, "I'm alive, I'm alive." She leaned tensely near the hearth and spoke, or she smiled without speaking. Her eyes were dim with the new birth and the bloom of renascence slightly blurred her consciousness as yet. The loaned word grew more vivid, "Tomorrow," substituted now for the unsaid word that receded, its mission accomplished. She leaned near the hearth.

Then she arose quickly and gathered her wraps and some clothing to a chair. She shut her fiddle into its case and placed the music in a pile beside it. Then she went below and hung a white cloth on the pillar of the portico, for she thought that the peddler might pass early. In her room again she found a piece of the coarse

bread under her pillow and of this she ate sitting wrapped in the blanket of the bed, the room being cold now, the fire almost gone. Without undressing she lay in the bed, ready for her departure, a gladness singing through her thin blood where life still beat. Presently she was aware that it was morning and that she had slept happily. She bathed in the cold water, shaking with cold and joy, and she ate the last of the bread. When the peddler brought his car along the driveway she took her things into her arms and went down to the portico.

"I'd be plumb pleased to death," he said when she asked her favor, although she told him she would have to ask him to wait for his pay. "I wouldn't charge a young lady e'er a cent to ride along with me. Pay? Don't say e'er word about pay. Would I charge a young lady to go a-riden with me? Sakes-alive!"

When he asked her where she wanted to go she had no answer ready, but she was joyous in her evasions, making questions and replies that kept the destination delicately poised at the brink of an answer. He would go here and stop there, naming farms, and he could come to Spring Run Valley by noon of the day, he said. Then he stopped at a farm, the house near the roadway, and called his wares to the farmer's wife, who bought. She peered curiously at the front of the truck but she made no comment.

"Where did you say you aimed to go?" he asked when they were on the road again, and she answered,

“Spring Run Valley.” Then he told her of the origin of the name, she having asked. “Spring Run is a creek that rises in a spring off a way to the north there.” He told the news of the countryside, of the dead, the sick, the new-born, the lucky. Along the roadside men were clearing the ditches, shoveling out drains for the roadway, and over the tops of the hills some crows were flying. The winter had blown the last leaf from every bush and every vine and the earth stood ready to be remade, the streams running cold under the little bridges, the water quick and yellow. The truck ran swiftly, and there were few sales made, for the people were busy with other matters, with the plant beds, the hen-houses, the early gardening or fencing. They would wave the liniment-man away with a greeting. “You know somebody in Spring Valley?” he asked. She did not know what she would say to that, and she waited for a reply to find its way to her mouth, her humor that of a bird waiting for its song. She saw her strange happiness going its unknown ways and she looked from afar, quaintly amused, as if place were a humorous adjunct to being, for if one is happy in being alive he has to have a place to be happy in. They could never take that away from happiness in being. That control of places kept in the hands of men, certain men, this seemed exquisitely droll.

“Miss Hettie, she up and married awhile back, took and married and went off right in the middle of the school. They haven’t got a teacher yet to the best of

my belief and knowledge. Doc Bradley said to me they would be right put-to to find one so late in the term." Bradley was the school trustee for the district, and the appointment of the teacher was his duty, he said.

She was weary in body, aching from the long ride, and a vertigo seized her now and then, induced by the unaccustomed motion of the truck and the swift passage, but her pleasure ran still with the slipping countryside as it opened before her and with the flocking of the crows as they made off toward some farther hill. She had waited for her replies as a bird might wait, but finally she made known her mission as it appeared to her. She would ask to be allowed to teach the Spring Run Valley school for the three months remaining. "So that's were you're bound for," he said. "Well I vum! They'll be right glad to get you, that I know." He would let her down at Dr. Bradley's house, he said. "I'm bound straight for that very place."

Then he took a package from his coat pocket and said that it was a snack of lunch his wife always wrapped up for him, that he never could tell where he would be for his dinner and she always tied him up a little snack to be on the safe side.

"I'm a mind to eat it now, to get shed of it," he said. "I'll be in Spring Valley to dinner, that I well see, and I always eat my dinner with Doc Bradley when I pass. I'm a mind to eat the bite I got here now, and maybe you'll have a bite along with me, just to keep me company."

He unrolled a paper from about the food and offered her one of the sandwiches in his hands. Then the juices of her vitals leaped like hungry serpents at the sight of the food and her hand reached for it, afraid it might be withdrawn, her hand trembling. She took the food out of his hand, her eyes smiling, her mind joyous, the serpent of her maw beating with anticipation, reaching forward with craving, and she knew that her way was strange as she took the bread into her hand, that even he, unobserving and eager to talk, one of his hands on the steering-wheel of the wagon, knew that her manner was biased, deflected from the ways of women. In her fingers the food was seen to be pieces of well-baked bread buttered richly, between the pieces bits of tender meat delicately salted, the flesh of cattle made ready for food. At the first moment a sickness arose as she swallowed, but she ate slowly, a rich repast, two pieces of buttered bread and the meat. When she had fed she drowsed slightly, and she let the morning spend itself as it would, let it run past her unhindered, noted but unguided.

Some people were standing in an old doorway talking together, and they shook their heads when the peddler called out to them, sufficient in themselves, joyous over some departure, waving hands as two went down a path. At a small gate beside a bridge a woman was driving a great turkey-gobbler, guiding it skilfully into the small entry, and her passing set a bright glow of color against the brown of the earth and the faint yel-

low that lay over the bushes, her shawl dull blue plaided with gray. Some children loitered at the side of the road making a seesaw of a fallen board and two larger girls came idly down the road under the lacery of stripped boughs, a renewed token that school did not keep. Her joy lasted and the journey came to an end. The truck went slowly down the village road between the small houses, scattering the hens from its path, calling the men to the door of the blacksmith's shop, curving its path to the curving way.

SIX

FROM her window she could see that the houses in the hamlet were close together, huddled about the blacksmith's shop and the store. The noises of the lane were near at hand, the voices intimate. She was in an upper chamber in Bradley's house to rest, for she had asked for two weeks' time. She had been sick, she said, but she was now recovering. In two weeks she would begin to teach the children. The doctor said finally:

"I expect your aunt, old Miss Doe, lives right close and stingy now. She's half starved you maybe."

"I've been sick. But I'll be well now," she said.

She would board with the doctor's family two weeks, resting. After that time she would be given her board, week by week, among the patrons of the school, as the custom was, for the pay was small. Her work at the Seminary had given her the teacher's credential. "I got no uneasiness but you'll be able to teach those young-ones a right smart," Dr. Bradley said. "First we must put a little meat on your bones."

The food was set on the table by the doctor's wife, a large, breathy woman who sank comfortably into her ampleness and formed a bulwark against which their children leaned. She talked habitually of her work, of

the food she prepared. Theodosia saw that she stilled her curiosity about herself, saw that she turned it into delicate sauces and the creamy essence of meats, nourishment for the body. The woman set upon each preparation diligently, carefully choosing an egg, rejecting a cream, tasting, studying, whipping, shredding, kneading, stirring, each dish brought to the board with a gesture of deep concern as she slightly leaned toward it to give it a last scrutiny. These attitudes were her habitual replies to her husband. The table was laid in the kitchen, for the days were cool and here was the most snug warmth. The doctor came from his office, a little room at the end of the yard, and sat at the head of the table. Sometimes he brought a patient with him, or a traveler, for there was always an extra place prepared. The heavy savors would arise and mingle sweetly with their hungers, with the faint odor of smoke from the cooking fire where the wood burned away now that it was no longer wanted. The doctor brought a breath of cold air with him and this lingered about his clothing and spread through the odorous warmth. When he was seated he bowed his head briefly and asked a blessing in a psalm-like sentence, and the little children would suck at their spoons and put their hands into their empty plates, an ear attentive to the blessing, of which they understood nothing but the amen, their hungers like the hungers of some small gentle beasts. The ceremony of carving and of passing plates was swiftly over, subordinated to their cravings. "Begin on your

plate while it's hot," the doctor would say. "No waiten. No use to make any more fuss. Eat your victuals while they're warm."

The men in the village road knew one another intimately, calling "John" or "Bill" or "Thad" back and forth, shouting orders or suggestions. Lee Cummings worked somewhere on a farm, but he came home with his team at nightfall, the empty wagon rattling through the roadway. Or beyond the vapors of her sleep she would hear a night-passenger, the wheels of a buggy or a car on the road which lay but a few feet from the house. In the early morning the village cows were driven to common waste pasture which was indifferently owned, along the creek, and the boys who drove them would loiter to swap knives or to boast of some personal excellence. A man's voice would call out a command or a threat and a boy would move after his cow, simulating hurry. Thad sold goods at the store. He would stand in the sun in the early morning waiting for trade to come to his door, shifting his feet, waiting to see what the weather would offer before he predicted the business of the day. Chickens ran in the road and plucked at the grain that dropped from passing wagons, but when feeding times came they gathered at old Oscar Turner's door. Thad would call out a jest or a truism to passing friends.

"Yes, the rich they have their ice in summer, but the poor they have their'n in winter, and everything hit's all evened up all round," he called after some leav-

ing companion, closing some tale or argument. He took credit to himself as a philosopher. Or again, as a prophet:

“Hit’ll rain all day, you may as well get ready for hit. See them-there hens out eaten grass in the rain? When you see hens out in the morning eaten grass in the rain, that’s a sure sign hit’ll rain all day.”

She walked through the lane toward the creek or returned to sit on Bradley’s doorstep, or she walked along the highroad past the store and the grist-mill, knowing no surprise that she should be there rather than anywhere else, and no surprise at the replies of the people that fell the one against another, as they talked of their tasks, every man knowing the other’s needs or peculiar quality. One of old Oscar Turner’s hens laid her eggs in an overturned barrel beside Thad’s door.

“I looked to see if she was on,” a man said, drawing back from the barrel.

“Is she on?”

“I wonder if old Oscar he’ll set her there.”

“A right public place.”

“That old domernik hen, she don’t mind, she’s got no shame.”

They were new with the beginning of the earth, beyond the reach of truism, fresh and uncertain, the dew of new-birth on every saying. They were of the world and the world was new. They were free of all but the bare statement of themselves as standing out

before time, before running duration. Kate Hull driving to the grist-mill with a sack of old corn to have it cracked for her pullets escaped truism as entirely as did Thad's voice and demeanor as he uttered his philosophies, as she drove awkwardly into the setting and sat dejectedly above the corn sacks. A man, Caleb Burns, rode down from the upper-lying farmland, riding a brown horse that had three white feet. A child named Sallie West, unknown to her as yet, sent her a handful of wild crocuses. A girl, at the door of the store, buying baking soda and lemon extract, invited her to a party. A woman standing by a gate, her hand stayed on the latch, said to her as she passed, "I heard you playen on your violin last night. I heard it when I was on my way to bed. It was a fair sound."

SHE met the children at the school on the appointed day. There were twenty-three, boys and girls. The schoolhouse stood near the creek at the end of the village, under a shade of beech and sycamore trees. Some of the children rode down from the upper valley each day in a buckboard cart, or a boy or two came horseback. Susan West, who drove the buckboard cart, would take the old horse from the shaves and hitch it under a great beech tree, and at noon one of the boys would, as his duty, without asking leave, take the eight ears of corn from under the buggy seat and feed the

old nag in a wooden box that was nailed to the tree. Old Oscar's hens would gather about the horse's feet to catch the wasted grains of corn. She began her progress up the valley, living first at the houses that were nearest to the school and moving week by week farther away, Cummings's first, and then Fishman's place, and Baker's.

The farmers had formed a beef company, a group of six or eight men who killed a beef every ten days or two weeks and shared in the meat by a carefully drawn contract. Each man furnished a yearling steer in turn and each man was given a part in turn. One or two of the men sold their portions, peddling it from house to house in the hamlet, or others used all, having many at hand to feed. The slaughter-house was a dull shed at the back of a small enclosure near the beginning of the village, removed from the schoolhouse by the whole length of the village, but Theodosia saw it as she walked in the late afternoon, and on the killing days she saw the men gathered there. A constant stench floated out from the place, and toward the back of the shed were scattered quantities of bones, the heads and feet of cattle that had been gnawed by the dogs until they were clean, some of them weathered white by the rains. Often the dogs fought there all night, their yelpings heard through her sleep, and the day after the night of the snarling dogs there was fresh meat on every table up and down the lane and the road, and fresh meat to eat with the bread for the school lunches.

It was sweet to taste, good to the mouth and satisfying to the want of the inner hunger. With the meat was buttered bread and apples from some cellar or apple house, or there was honey that had been saved from the past year's garnering, or conserve. Sometimes a sheep was slaughtered on one of the farms, or if these animals were lacking there were fowls to be baked and served in their richly buttered sauces.

At playtime the children played a game, singing,

I went to the door and picked up a pin,
And asked if Mistress Jones was in,
She neither was in she neither was out,
She's up in the garret a-hoppen about.

Theodosia heard the song without surprise, heard the strange quality of the singing as it rang and hollowed broadly under the great beech trees along the creek. Here the cries of the birds were the more broadly dispersed as tone, richly amplified. The children were, in general, attentive to their lessons and eager to progress, to atone for their long vacation. If they were dull, Theodosia, in her distress at this, played for them on the fiddle. The day little Johnnie Turner could not learn to spell "hitching" she played a *Romance* and an *Adagio*, a pensive wailing, until all the children were happy and they leaned forward on their desks, a-*tiptoe*, to hear. She heard their song game while she sat under the beech tree at noon not far from Susan's nag, not far from old Oscar's hens, she eating her lunch, the

food some village wife had prepared for her. The names the children called as they walked away, beginning conversations, lay out under the great beeches as aliens, as belonging to the farms up the valley, and she accepted the names for tone without questioning the owner as to whether he were man or child or woman —the names, Shirley Bond, Betty Hawthorne, Rose Hines, Lum Brown. The little girls were equal in importance, none seeming to dominate the rest, the child, Sallie West, always giving, supplying the others, making the others safe or comfortable at the game, a talkative child. A voice said one day, receding down to the end of the playground where the little children kept, "Betty Hawthorne has got a blue ribbon," or another said again, "Mollie has got a silver cup." There were rainy days when the beech trees dripped their dejected wet. Sometimes she called the children to their books by playing a jig. They had their sayings; they would talk of leaving kisses in the drinking dipper, or they called water left in the dipper after one had drunk "slobbers." "Let me have your slobbers," a little boy said to his favorite among the girls. Or another, "I bid for Susan's slobbers." Susan and Sallie were the West girls; they came from the top of the valley, Susan a strong, well-rounded girl, misty and vague with her first flowering, neither child nor woman. "She takes after Mammy," Sallie said. "She's a liven image of . . ." she called some strange name. They liked to dwell upon whom they took after, each child

designating himself and trying to discover himself. The lessons in the books were remote from them, were unknown gods to be appeased with offerings of study. Their learnings were ceremonials far apart from their richer flow of living. They measured their height at a door-post and compared this year with last, and they watched one another. Their words, coming to her from the end of a game, while they sat to rest:

“What color is Betty Hawthorne’s hair?”

“It’s red.”

“It is not so.”

“It’s brown and red mixed. I looked close at it one time.”

“Roan color is what it is. I heard my pap say one time it was roan color.”

“You think your pap knows everything. Your pap, he don’t own the earth.”

“I touched Betty Hawthorne one time.”

“I laid my eyes on her. That’s as close as ever I got to her.”

“I touched her.”

“Where’d you touch her?”

“I touched her on the leg.”

They were singing the game again, the voices blended to a high thin shouting that spread widely under the great trees and out before the creek.

Down she came as soft as silk,
A rose in her bosom as white as milk.

She took off her glove and showed me her ring,
Tomorrow, tomorrow the wedding begins.

Oh, mercy on me what have I done!
I've married the father instead of the son.
His back's as crooked as an old tin pan,
And they're all a-laughen at my old man.

Theodosia wrote sums on the board and made history questions and outlines or searched out stories to read and made maps with chalk; and felt a slight and very inward jealousy of Betty Hawthorne as holding the interest and affection of the small girls and boys. Betty Hawthorne might wear her blue ribbons and knot up her roan-colored hair for all she cared, and she played a capricious dance tune at the end of the noon hour to state her jealousy of this creature, a careless air barbed with subtle darts that deflected it from its kept rhythm, that jerked it hither and yon under the implied three-four of the measure, her lips smiling. All about the men were planting the corn. All day, looking across the creek from the windows of the schoolhouse, she could see the drills working up and down making exact rows through the broken soil. Everywhere the gardens were being planted, rows of seeds put into the soil in orderly ways to yield them food.

"My own hair, it might be called roan-colored too," she said, "but a dark roan. A rose in her bosom as

white as milk is no matter. I'm a dark roan myself. . . ."

THE men were taking a cow through the road toward the slaughter-pen, a fattened heifer to be killed for beef. She came from Burns's farm at the head of the creek valley.

"What does he kill a heifer for?" one asked at the door of the store. "What for does he kill a heifer?"

"No good, she is. Wouldn't calve."

The beast had run past the slaughter-yard and come to the creekside, and four men were not able to drive her. She would go uncertainly forward a few feet or turn and run back, all the men after her with staves, or she broke through hedges and jumped fences, mad to get away. After two hours of struggle she was back by the creek again running in the school-yard. She was a well-marked creature, fattened for the slaughter, but alert and sinewy. She broke one of her horns on Bradley's gate, but she did not consent to go where the men meant to take her, and she leaped the hedge again. Lee Cummings was after her, and Will Judson, and Lum Brown, the black man who worked with the Burns cattle, who always shot the beef with his shotgun. The heifer's hair was all on end now and her eyes were wild, her side bleeding where she had scraped against some broken gate hinge, her feet cut and her

left horn gone. The children at the school could scarcely attend to their books, knowing how the struggle went forward, although two or three of the boys wanted to join in the fight.

"Would you expect her, though, to walk gentle up to the slaughter-pen and put her head inside the door?" Thad asked. He was standing at noon by the school-yard gate. "That's how a man expects a critter he aims to butcher to act. Walk right up in front of the shotgun and stand straight."

The conflict ended at noon when the beast was entrapped in the slaughter-house, but Lum Brown would not go inside to shoot. Hearing the lessons during the afternoon, Theodosia knew the end of the struggle, and the children knew, and a mingled satisfaction and distress made them mindful of their books, abstracted and attentive to the printed sayings of their pages. Lum Brown had been obliged to push the barrel of the gun through a crack in the boarded wall and shoot the heifer from without. There was no answer to the question raised by the unwilling heifer. The answers in the books were easily found.

SHE had moved up the valley and spring was well at hand. She sat in Judson's house on a cold green afternoon in late April. The stones of the hearth tilted away from the fireplace and sloped off to the floor, which

gave unevenly toward the rear right corner of the room. A jar of cream had been set to sour beside the fender. The children were climbing over one another and over their mother's feet, asking the words in their books. The mother with a baby in her arms was slowly rocking, was mending a garment, was giving the child her breast. Her hair was marked with gray as if a veil of light were spread under its darkness, and her great bosom was without flesh, was powerful with brawn and gland and bone. This would be her last child, and a quiet in her spent body said, "I am glad; I had enough." The door to the front bedroom was opened and in the other room, that for the guest, a new fire burned coldly in the grate.

It was the same everywhere with a slight difference, the slow fire of the afternoon in the snug room. At Baker's there were no infants, but three grown girls came in with embroidery pieces and sat stitching. "Shadow-work" they called what they did. At Sayre's there was an unborn child. Mr. Fishman would come into his house in the mid-afternoon and fumble awhile at a closet with the faint muffled sound of a bottle and a glass. Lee Cummings had counted on his fingers and marked the foaling of an animal on the calendar that hung beside the mantel. This was the world. She knew no surprise of it and no surprise for herself as being there. Red clover and orchard grass were together in the meadows, growing higher every week. Faint lines of green were crisscrossing the cornfields, going two

ways in orderly processions, opening out and closing together as she went by. The men called their sayings from about the shop and the store or the women called from doorways, and she heard the noises a wagon made as it went empty along the road, the noise of wood beating on wood, of wood on iron, of iron on iron, of iron on stone, horse-iron on stone. The voices of the little children came to her as she sat to eat her food at noon under the greatest beech tree, as they were bent to their play at making farms and highroads through the moist earth, and their words, "Queen . . . Mollie . . . Shirley Bond . . . the silo . . . Betty Hawthorne . . . the cut-up-corn machine," would arise to speech in their disputes or blend again to the flow of some remote water in their purring acquiescences and contents.

"Betty Hawthorne has got a calf," one said.

"Is it Betty Hawthorne's calf, or Caleb Burns's calf?"

"It's both of um's together."

"Betty Hawthorne has got a silver cup, two cups. I saw Betty Hawthorne's cups last week."

"I touched Betty Hawthorne myself."

"Where'd you touch 'er?"

"I touched her on the tit. Where would I be a-touchen 'er?"

"Did you ever milk Betty Hawthorne?"

"Milk? A girl couldn't milk Betty Hawthorne, or Mollie either. She gives a whole water-bucket full."

Your wrist would in a manner break off in the bones.
It takes Shirley Bond to milk."

OR Tom Yancey gathered up the lambs, his flock, with his cries, cries the sheep knew from long use, and carried them with him down the pasture. A woman once said, "If a young lamb is lost from its mother and is off in some far part of the field, I'll tell you what he can do. Two hundred lambs he's got, and over, and you'd think they all look just alike. He can pick up the lamb and carry it across the field amongst a hundred-and-over ewes, and set it down alongside its own mother." He was seen walking down a field carrying a young lamb in his arms. Or on another day he took all the sheep across two farms, down lanes and turnings, taking them to newer eatage. He would walk at the head of the flock, sometimes calling gently, and all the sheep walked close about him. His form stood high out of the sheep. A woman standing in a doorway, seeing him pass, the tall man that he was with the low sheep following and flowing around his feet, said, "The Good Shepherd. Look! How he's got them gentled!" and another voice, "They confidence him, the sheep." And, "See, there goes the Good Shepherd, goen past."

Theodosia saw them flow about his feet like dull yellow-gray waves of water when he took them from pasture to pasture to feed. But one day, June, he sold

them to the trader, and then he led them down the road, past the shop, past the store, beyond the schoolhouse and over the creek, along the stony road, himself walking ahead and calling with low cries if the sheep lagged, but they lagged but seldom, for they flowed evenly after him, crowding for near places and hurdling up toward his shadow, running up the stony lane toward the shipping pen. They were seen intently long after they were gone from the way, seen moving along the highroads and farther.

ONE morning when she came to the school she saw that the little children were huddled together before the coalhouse at the back of the yard as if they were afraid, clustered together as fowls afraid of a hawk. Two larger boys played with a ball along the creek-side. When she went inside she found the blackboards and walls written over with obscene words, her name among them. The little children had been inside the house to leave their books and their food, but she knew that they had not written on the walls, and that it was unlikely that the boys throwing the ball before the creek had written. She erased the words slowly, carefully, without anger, thinking of how they belonged to the entire country, valley and upland and the farms beyond, the town, all towns and cities. They belonged to Thad and his wisdoms and gallantries, himself step-

ping about his store quickly to get her yards of cloth wrapped into a neat yellow bundle. They belonged to Anne Sawyer and her unborn child and to Johnnie Turner weeping over his multiplication tables, and to the man Caleb Burns riding down from the upper fields on his neat horse with three white feet, as much to Caleb Burns as if he had written them himself, and equally to Mary Judson holding her last infant to her great bosom. She erased the words, seeing them, unafraid of them. They named the excretions of the body and the acts of excretion, she observed. If one is to name the discharges of the body he should name them all, she thought, looking at the last of the words as she erased. Name them all, slighting none. Among these words should be written the omitted word, a true juice of the human frame, *tear*. Spelled with four letters, as were the other words, she ruminated, belonging with the others entirely. Let the boy, whoever he was, who wrote for the whole people of the community, let him write the last word; he would write it in time, this supreme juice from the body of man, the point where he stands above himself, where he outdoes the cattle.

The words were all erased now and her hands dusted free of the chalk. She was thinking of the men of the countryside as she knew them, as she had seen them about. She called the roll of them with a swift thought as she stood there, appraising them, measuring their quality, at first in one mass and later as one by one. Will Judson was busy, intent on his children and his

business, scarcely aware of his wife, at whom he never looked. He was a pleasant, abstracted man of middle age, too deeply married to his wife ever to see her again. Thad was a kind, cheerful, conceited yokel. Fishman was married to his bottle, coupled by way of his beloved glass. Lee Cummings went then down the frieze of the roll and passed quickly by, for he had the odor of a goat or of a discarded kidney thrown behind the slaughter-house ten days. "It may be the corduroy he wears," she said, and he passed with the calling of his name. Charlie Johns then, a gay youth, given to cock-fighting and over-dressing on Sundays, a lightness of touch in his goings and comings. The eldest Weakley boy was solid matter and was devoted to Rowena West, as was said, devoted finally and without departure. The Baker girls, sitting over their shadow-work, had told her this. West came then, Lucian West. He had been to visit the school with his daughters, Susan and Sallie, to see how they did. He was Rowena's father, husband to their mother. He was full of kindly feeling and full of the goodness of life, and he went with brisk steps along the road, giving cheerful good-mornings to all the men and women alike, but the women would like him best. Beyond, in the next farm, past West, came Caleb Burns and his men, Shirley Bond and Lum Brown, the negro who shot the beef cattle. Lum Brown came and went on loaded wagons, a large man firmly put together, a large kindly mouth that turned easily with its utterances. Shirley Bond she knew of from the

West child, Sallie; he rode away out of the country every Sunday to see some woman somewhere. He was a great sunburnt man, a giant upstanding to take the red of the sun on his face and on his neck, and he belonged with the Shorthorn cows in the pastures and breeding pens. Caleb Burns, then, the master of the Shorthorns, seen going along the road on the top of a wagon piled with old hay. He was the owner of the cows, Mollie, Queen, and Betty Hawthorne, and of the one Sallie had been taught not to dare name, the one she called the "male cow," Good Boy. He rode down into the village on a trim horse with three white feet. "He's a queer one," Thad said to her once, explaining him after his departure, "but it takes all sorts to make up this-here world. He's a queer one, but we-all got used to his ways a long while back, and we hardly notice how queer he might seem to a new-comer in our midst." There had been a woman about him once, but Sallie was vaguely informed of her. He was a sun-browned man with dark hair, a gaunt man. His lips seemed always prepared for speech, he seemed always about to speak or to have just spoken, and he talked to everybody as if they knew all he meant. "He's a smart man underneath it all, as smart as ever I saw in life, and it's his book-sense, I reckon, makes him so he seems different," Thad said. Beyond, going far, vaguely merged with outlying farms, were vague names, Bose Hines, Farley Penn, and Washington Tandy, names gathered back into the fields and distances. This was

the list of the valley as it reached upward toward the farms and frayed into the hills.

THE tenth week she stayed at Alfred Kirk's place and rode back and forth morning and evening with Susan and Sallie in the buckboard behind the large-boned old horse, and the eleventh week she stayed at Si Weakley's and rode with Susan and Sallie again. "Next week and you'll get to know Rowena," Sallie promised her, offering Rowena with pride. The twelfth week brought her to the top of the valley.

The house at West's place stood sharply defined at the head of the rise of land, but lying away to the south were rolling levels of fields that were of one elevation. The grassy yard before the house was without a path although feet walked there freely and the front door was opened for use. There was a square porch before the house with pillars above and below, the wood of the pillars white against the dull red brick wall. A pet goose came to the doorstep and begged for attention. There were only two rooms above-stairs, a diminished house that belied the spacious doorway. There were no boys in the household and it was Susan who fed the old nag and carried in the water.

It was the busy season with the farmers, and all went early to bed, Lucian West rising stiffly from his chair after supper, drawing himself up slowly as his

limbs cried out their protest at the fields; but on his feet he walked away briskly, making no compromises with his hurts. Neighbors came to borrow tools or to beg seeds or plants, or to grind tools at the stone. Si Weakley's oldest boy came to talk with Rowena a little before he rested for the night. Lucian West and the girls called the mother by some name which had been kept from Rowena's first prattlings, "Meedee," or "Midi"—they could not say how it should be spelled.

Then Theodosia asked leave to stay at the farm during the summer, boarding, for she had saved the money she had earned, and their consent pleased the small child, Sallie, very well. Lucian West proposed that her bed be made on the upper porch.

"Couldn't you, Midi? I've heard it said it's a prime thing to sleep out for a body that's been out of health for a spell."

Lying on the upper porch, the small square upper stoop above the front doorway, she could look at the night sky between the trees, all the people now in their beds to rest. Outside the tree-grown garden the road ran past, and beyond the road lay the Burns pasture, the great barns in the middle vista, and often she could hear the cattle eat if they came near the roadway to crop the grass, for they ate at night when the moon shone. Lying thus, she would go out quietly across the powdered dark that was granulated with dull light, go with the incandescent insects and the firmaments of night-cries that set stars of sound into the mellow

black. Midi, when her daughters were safely away, liked to talk about brothels and women selling for hire. She lay now on the porch to sleep, she, Theodosia, on the bed Midi had made for her; she had come house by house up the valley. Midi was kind, a little withering woman with a high voice and hard, nervous, knotty hands. She saw Midi acutely as she lay in the half-dark to rest, and she heard again her breathless, fearful stories and conjectures of what must pass in wicked places. She knew that the woman was thus because she was heightened by the going of her prolific age, by the passing of her fecund power. The fiddle was stilled that she might not awaken those asleep in the house, but her mind played at a crooked phrase, a distressed lack-melody that mounted with a perpetual question toward the constellations in the open sky above and in the grass below, Midi turned momentarily back upon herself in intense departure, and she reflected that a woman's life is short and full of peril.

Or she would remember Sallie's song. Sallie gathered strawberries from the garden, bobbing among the straw-lined rows as if she were a giant hop-toad. Rowena was her chief admonisher, and if she were admonished enough she would scrape the new potatoes out of their thin pinkish skins and wash them in readiness for the cooking. She brought the peas to Theodosia's porch and shelled them there, and often she would remember a song about the peas, a singsong tune,

Who buttoned up the peasecod?
Who buttoned up the bean?
I'm sure I never buttoned any,
Although I've unbuttoned a many.

Caleb Burns had sung that song to her, she said, one day when he had come upon her as she shelled behind the house at the kitchen steps. She would laugh at the invisible buttons and drop the unbuttoned peas lazily into her pan.

THEY would sit about the doorway after sundown to rest and often a neighbor, come on an errand, would linger with them there. Sallie would have fastened the last of the chickens and turkeys into their small coops and she would sit in the grass, growing quiet now as she approached the necessity of sleep. On Saturday evenings the talk beside the door lasted until long after nightfall. Sometimes Theodosia would sit with them in the twilight, or again she would go to the upper gallery, her place, and play for them on her instrument if they desired this, or she would call down replies to them when she was questioned. Often Caleb Burns came, stopping but a little while if it were an evening before a busy day, or lingering an hour or more at the end of the week. Then he and Lucian West talked of their farming and recounted their experiments or offered proofs of this thing and that, or Burns fell

into monologue while all sat still to hear him. Midi would be asked to confirm a date, or place rightly some distant sequence of incidents. She dated all happenings by the birth of some child, either her own or some other woman's offspring. Her chronology was final and beyond dispute, her datings written with the indelibles, pain and new life. The men used history and memory and were often refuted, their method wanting.

Sitting on the small gallery above, their voices would come to Theodosia, but half attended, as the refrains from some flowing song into which she had gone and in which she lived. Caleb talked of the age when man followed after the herds as they roamed, to prey on their flesh, of the deep relation between man and these beasts, or another voice would give some reply. Man following after the herds. . . . Or, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn. . . ." The Shorthorn, called formerly Durham, or Teeswater, or Holderness. . . . Used to be called the Patton stock in America, but new breeds imported of late. . . . This winter I fed corn silage with oat and clover hay and ground corn for a grain ration, mixed with bran and cottonseed meal, in proportions 200, 200, and 75. . . . Percentage of shrinkage in corn . . . Mineral mixture for hogs. . . . Wood ashes and common salt. Ten parts of wood ashes to one part of salt. . . . Worms in hogs. . . . Internal parasites in sheep. . . . Grub-in-head, lung-worm, tape-worm, nodular disease, stomach-worms. . . . Drenchings. . . . Three-ounce doses of

one per cent copper sulphate solution given three days in succession. . . . Drench your sheep twice a year. . . . Young lambs before and at weanen time.

“Caleb, he’s a queer man,” Rowena had said. She was seen churning the cream in a rocking churn, her moist hands soft on the handle as she tilted it forward and back. She worked on the stone-paved terrace at the back of the house, in the north shade of the early morning, not far from the milk house where the cream was kept. Often Lester Weakley came to speak to her there, looking into her soft face. She was moist and fresh, was but more of the sweet butter she churned, garnered fat become flesh. “Caleb, he’s queer. I don’t know another like Caleb.”

“Well, I’ll tell you about Caleb,” West had said as he passed, stopping a little on the stones to talk. “I’ll tell you how he is. He don’t make clear much money, maybe, but he makes mighty good Shorthorns, mighty good.”

“In his talk he’s queer,” Rowena said. “He says out loud anything that might come into his head. He says out all those little things that come in your head, things you never heard about, or heard anybody speak about, or never read about in a book.”

“He raises mighty good Shorthorn cows, now,” the other said. “I don’t know anybody raises better. In debt, he is, they say, and it’s true, and he may go broke yet. Makes no mint of money, but by golly he makes mighty good cows.”

"It's not because he's got book-sense, either," Rowena said, following her own. "Old Mr. Tumey, he's got book-sense, and he's not a thing on earth like Caleb Burns. Caleb, it seems like he says out all those little things that come in head, that you wouldn't think to say. That nobody else says. That lay in your mind, you might say. He's queer like that. I never saw another like him. You're bound to give in he's queer. But I reckon he does raise right good stock."

To the small gallery, the voices. Fine milk and beef cattle, that they are. Three times a day we milk. Twice a day for us is enough. . . . Oh, tirra-lirra, joy come thither. . . . Betty Hawthorne, 17,768.6 pounds of milk in a twelve months and out of it 581.4 pounds of butter fat. How about Queen? . . . 16,990-and-over pounds of milk, or Mollie, 14,000 pounds and over. . . . Or Princess. . . . Betty Hawthorne and Princess carry the blood of Julia 16, and so does Good Boy 11, and there never was a better transmitten sire than Good Boy. . . . Their names all written in the Short-horn Herd Book, registered cows. . . . Pure-bred Shorthorns are a good stock, as fine as there is, I reckon. We ship the cream and let the calves and pigs take up the skim. . . . Did you notice the papers to-day? What's the quotation? . . . I always keep the run of the market. . . . I could almost tell you her registered number, Betty Hawthorne's, three six six five eight nine something, I forget the exact figures. Or Mollie. . . . My aim is to people the pasture with

good cows. . . . Her name written in the Shorthorn Book of Herds. . . . Or there's Prudence. I expect you'll get big figures out of Prudence. . . . When she comes to the milken age. Second calf of Mollie's. Mollie's first was a bull and we butchered it.

Is my name written there,
On that page white and fair . . .

Milk cows ought to have a legume hay, clover, alfalfa, or maybe peas or soy beans. But sorghum hay can be used, but then the grain feed will have to be more liberal. The leaves make a pleasant coolness when they fan the night air and the nightjars dart through the sky with opened mouths to drain the insects out of the dark. The mid-summer insects were crying a week ago and the longest day in the year has passed. The voices below, speaking forth and back:

“What year did Jones run for Congress, now?”

“About ninety-nine or ninety-eight.”

“Jones? No, about ninety-two that was. I'll tell you for why I think so. . . .”

“It was eighteen ninety-six,” Midi said. “Eighteen ninety-six it was and no mistakes made.”

“Before ninety-six, I'll bet my last dollar on it. I'm under a doubt that it was as late as that, Midi.”

“It was ninety-six. I know. It was the same year Rowena was borned. I have a way of knownen. I recall. We all know what year Rowena was borned in. How old

are you, Rowena? Just ask Rowena how old she is and you get the answer to how long it's been."

"I'm nineteen now."

"Nineteen. That's how long it's been. Ninety-six, it was."

SHE would not go to look at his cattle although Midi invited her, offered to take her there. The harvesters came to the wheat, and the cut field, laid up in orderly bundles, row after row, was increased in size, multiplied or enhanced by the elasticity of lines spreading two ways over a rolling land. The harvest hands were lusty feeders, sitting heartily to the food Midi and Rowena and Susan prepared, pouring great goblets of soured milk from the tall white pitcher or helping themselves again to the roasted meat that was piled high on the platter. Some voice at the cattle barns beyond the road and the pasture sang from mid-summer forward. Sallie found two saddles for as many old brood mares that were unemployed in the fields, and she and Theodosia rode back through the farm paths into remote land and explored a tangle of twiggy glades to find the spring that gave the first water to Spring Run, and they lay to rest all through the heat of the day in the cool woodland. The oat harvest followed the wheat, the voice at the distant barn singing now and then, Caleb Burns singing over the heads of his cattle,

some phrase as "We're marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion," phrases that intoned well before the great barn and fitted well to the voice as it hollowed richly before the resonant walls, the lay of the hills lending assistance.

We're marching upward to Zion,
The beautiful city of God. . . .

In the dusk before the house door, he had looked at her once, his eyes pointed with some distress. "I saw you the day you came here, in the wagon with the peddler," he said. His face had been in that moment pointed, like the face of a fox, drawn to a sharp focus by its troubled interval, "I saw you the day you came here."

"Now I'll tell you-all what my idea is about a sugar-cured ham. Meat, now, ought to be allowed to take salt a day and a half for every pound in the piece. A ham weighen eighteen pounds ought to stay in the salt twenty-seven days. Twenty pounds, if your ham weighs, then thirty days in the salt. . . ." The refrains hung over the summer country and settled to the distant groves of locust that grew in the places where the hills crumpled together. The tomato vines in the garden were hanging thick now with great green fruits which Midi, when they were turning toward a pale white for ripening, laid in rows on an outer shelf or on the stringers of the fence where they flushed daily more

red. The odors of cooking tomato relishes savored the house and the yard when Midi made ready for the winter. Lucian West took three of his sugar-cured hams from the luscious, feathery dark of his meat house where they had ripened, and sold them to someone in the town.

In him, Caleb, there was a sense of the whole country, of the rolling farms as owned up and down the watercourses and farther, including the town, Anneville and beyond, other towns, Lester, Quincy, all the reach of the entire region. With a gesture he included all, fearless, comprehending, or he spoke of the people of Anneville, knowing them, of the history of the place and how each street was named, Hill Street, Jackson, Simon, Tucker Lane, Crabtree Lane. . . . The buying of seeds and the summer faced toward the new year. . . . I see where I can get . . . Frost-proof cabbage. . . . Bermuda onion plants. . . . Unhulled white-blossom sweet clover, six dollars. . . . It was still summer, the nightjars crying in the sky, the fireflies making jeweled streaks in the dark, moving upward. Caleb's voice, saying man looks forward toward a city, always looks forward to a city, a place, streets of gold, jasper walls, but looks backward to a garden, Eden. "Looken back he sees a garden. Well? . . ."

"It's been about twelve years since the first automobiles came into this country," Lucian West said. "Fully twelve, and look how many people still hold a prejudice against . . ."

"Hardly twelve, I'd say, although I don't exactly recollect."

"It's been twelve if it's been a day, and look how headstrong some keep. . . ."

"Nine, it's been," Midi said. "Nine exactly. It was the year Julie Judson was—the year little Sadie Judson was borned. I know. I recall. You can't get that outen my head. I recall what a hard time Julie had all spring and I recall Dr. Bradley a-sitten in Julie's room a-talken about the first automobile that went through the road, and it was that very day, that day it went past, and a-talken about what a stir it made. Theodosia can tell you how old Sadie Johnson is. She kept the roll-call at the schoolhouse."

"Midi's right. It's been nine years," Theodosia said. "Nine is on the roll book."

Where did the people of this country come from? The question was asked and some reply given—from Virginia. Long ago. The garden spot of the earth. They came through the Wilderness Trace. The voices about the door flowed backward toward ultimate beginnings and settled slowly around their sad maxims and histories. Before dark had fallen she had seen his eyes as he, Caleb Burns, had greeted her, and she had seen that there were flakes of amber in their brown parts and that the lids were heavy as if they could not rest entirely. The talk dwelt on the town again, Anneville, named for a woman, Anne Montford. "Your great-great-grandmother," he said. He knew of them, speak-

ing of them tenderly now. "Mother to Theodosia Montford, grandmother to Anthony Bell. . . ."

BUT one day she went to see the cattle, Midi having been asked by Caleb to bring her, and with Midi and Sallie she walked down the road that curved once toward the south and turned in at the large gate where the driveway began. As they walked back through the pasture they were met half-way by Caleb, and Shirley Bond left his mowing and came toward the barns to bring the cattle to be viewed. Mollie and Queen were on the rise of the hill near the haw tree and Theodosia walked there with Caleb and Midi and Sallie, and she laid her hands on the animal's shoulders and looked at her, Queen, at her great hard eyes with their murky veins, at her thick shoulders and her falling dewlap and low brisket. There was a great fullness beginning at her middle under part and extending backward and downward, the great sack where the milk vein emptied the milk for storage. Her teats, hanging to her shanks, almost to her feet, were tight and full of life, delicately pink with blood. The hairs of her coat, viewed closely, were red and white, salted together in varying degrees of one on the other so that she was spotted with white or roan spots that shaded to red about her face and neck or again about her feet. Mollie was less quiet and she moved nervously away to find eatage at the other

side of the pasture, where her pale sides and flanks sank into the bright play of sun and shadows from a locust tree.

Betty Hawthorne stood in the shade of a sugar tree chewing her cud, half sleeping, her eyes fixed on the barn at the end of the field. She was redder than Queen and larger in frame, her udders even more ripe and low-drooping. Her horns curved slightly above her eyes and her large jaws showed the veins that branched under the heavy skin. She was dreamily set to the business of chewing, her great body having succumbed to the tyranny of milk. Princess was beautifully marked with white spots that were balanced, side for side. The long straight line of her back that curved upward slightly at the base of her head drew the design into form.

The calves were penned in a smaller pasture beside the barn, five or six heifers. They played together, trying to use their horns, or one or two bawled at the fence, but their mothers were undisturbed. "She's well enough off," Princess said through her indifference as she bent her straight back slightly to take a bite of clover. Betty Hawthorne too had an offspring among the young in the calf pen. Caleb pointed it out.

"I'll raise it to a year old or so and put it on the market. Weaned now. He's a good calf but he's not marked right and so he'll have to go for beef."

The great white sire, Good Boy, stood in a pen be-

yond the lower barn, fenced by rails that were strung high above his head. He was larger than his cows and his coat was creamy white, soft and pliable, in the fine pink of health and life. His horns were short and slightly drooped downward. He had left the grass of his enclosure and stood complacently beside the fence, chewing sleepily. The great ring through his nose scarcely moved as he opened his mouth, and when he swallowed he fell momentarily asleep, but another pellet of unchewed matter, arising from below with a spasmodic movement, would awaken him.

She walked among his cattle, these great beasts that had been brought to serve the needs of men, that had been deflected from their own ends by husbandry, and she admired their shining coats of fine red-and-white hair and their great bodies. The calves were restless now, crying now and then, some of them giving deeply matured cries, others the bleat of the young. This disturbance made a pleasant din that settled over the pasture and brought nearer the milking hour. Only one, Mollie, was nervous and wild, and she had run to the end of the pasture where she gamboled with some others, her necessity upon her, but the great quiet sire was unaware of her as yet.

Walking beside Theodosia, keeping always at her elbow, Caleb Burns told her the good qualities of each beast, offering figures in proof, pointing out this and that. Midi was as quiet as a dove, or she would ask a

question of the flow of milk or the age of a heifer, shy of the great male and willing to turn away from his pen.

Theodosia knew the intensities of Midi as she walked up the pasture toward the rise of the low hill, going now to view Prudence, two years old, not yet come to the age of milk, but beautifully marked and deeply characterized by the qualities her author had devised for her. The intensities of Midi contrasted the quiet of the herd at this hour, the hour before milking time, when the lush plenty of the grass and the filled rumen induced quiet, but the force of intense life lay back of the animals in the power of their great bodies and of the young that were gathered in the calf pens. Or walking along the grass toward the middle of the pasture, Caleb talked about the beginning of the breed near the river Tees at Croft and about the first Duchess, man borrowing and shaping a little the power under the earth.

Midi and the child, Sallie, were gone now, had walked away toward the road after they had stopped to gather a few wild berries from the briars. Some little birds that were flocked in a clump of haws then began to sing, all in harmony, twittering together as a burst of high song out of a bush, as if it were to celebrate the coming of Aphrodite among the herds, to announce the beginnings of fine desires and the passing of Aphrodite among the pastures. They passed the haw trees and came then to a walnut sapling, but they turned back

again and came the way they had gone. The insufficient summer twilight was beginning to settle to the pasture and the abundant but inadequate thorn bushes kept their singing, a burst of loud high twittering. The cows had been gathered to the barns. Caleb Burns, his hands touching her hands, was talking, had been talking from moment to moment. "I've dreamed about you so long, my arms fitted around you, seems, now you're here I'm afraid, as if my mind would burst open. What will we do? . . . The moon tonight will be a petal from an old flower." They were walking back toward the sugar tree, toward the highroad. "It'll go, maybe, and we'll never know what way it went. Between two summers and it'll be gone, this drunkenness. I'll have you then, maybe, the way Lucian West has Midi, unable to come to the house without I find you and have something to say about a gate-post or a milk can, God knows! . . . I saw you the day you came here, in the wagon with the peddler. . . ."

Night then, in the upper gallery, and she was trying to picture Caleb's face, to restore it entirely now that it was not by. A hard pointed face, sharpened to a moment of anxiety, or diffused to a general scrutiny as he looked at Queen's offspring, searching for blemishes, looked back then at her face. She saw him as a vague shape against the haw bushes. "I'm a-goen to give you Betty Hawthorne. The best cow I've got. If you'll be so good as to have her until I can make you a better."

"No, not Betty Hawthorne. No. A sprig of hawthorn flower in the spring from the bushes at the top of the pasture, or a handful of bright red haws in the fall. I'll string a string of beads out of them, or I'll eat the little haw-apples. A handful of haws."

"Betty Hawthorne, I aim to give you, if you'll be so good as to take her. The finest cow I ever owned, and the prettiest. Sister to Princess, full sister, and half-sister to Queen. She's taken three premiums at the state fair and not yet come to her prime. If you'll be so good as to take her."

She reheard the argument, their voices falling together, one over the other or waiting for a reply, one voice for a moment stilled but answering in turn with swifter fervor. "Whenever I touch you," his voice making the saying, "I have to take a deeper breath to accommodate the new life that's grown in me." He had marks—what kind of marks? she questioned—beside his mouth. They were deep marks, put there by a woman, or perhaps they had been put there by the cows in their failures to fulfil the promises he devised for them.

Then she remembered hell. A clear sharp memory, acutely realized, the more acutely realized in that it fell in this moment of pleasure. Self appeared, saturated with memory-realization, herself subtracted from the earth and elevated to a pinnacle of searching, her body hungering, seeing itself slipping into decay. All the disconnections operating, everything was lost

then but Frank. Frank in her hands and her fingers, her shoulders, her name, her sight, her sleep. Pure and excruciating distress shook her as if it were a chill and she called to her grandfather, Anthony Bell, but when she was more quiet again, the memory receding, she called in mind the newer name.

She heard the noises of the night, the treefrogs and crickets, the frogs at the wet place beyond the milk house. The frogs set themselves against the night as if to saw a hole into the dark, but when they were done there was a season of quiet. The night was warm and the people indoors slept noisily, their breathing and their sighs in sleep a protest against the heat. She heard them faintly as they moved or threshed at their beds or sucked inward at the hot close air. Outside the purity of the night spread over the cut fields and the cows were laid down on the open pasture-top near the ragged tree. Steps came off the farther slope, man's steps, sublimated and hollowed by the distance, feet walking through the grass, about the barns, off to the farther end of the pasture. They were lost then and denied as being delusion, an impossible. The night was warm and all but herself were asleep, drugged by the heat indoors. She saw them laid out to sleep or crumpled into relaxed postures, in their beds, up and down the countryside, from farm to farm, abstracted, a man asleep. Man lies down to rest, but the cows rest half kneeling, their crumpled forefeet ready to arise. She saw Caleb Burns asleep.

The leaves of the poplar tree lifted and turned, swayed outward and all quivered together, holding the night coolness. The steps returned to the pasture, going unevenly and stopping, going again, restless. They went across the hollow place and came back again toward the rise where the cows lay. They walked among the sleeping cows, but these did not stir for it was a tread they knew.

THE END

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